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LAD AND LASS

A STORY OF LIFE IN ICELAND.

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LAD AND LASS

LAD AND LASS

A Story of Life in Iceland

TRANSLATED FROM THE ICELANDIC OF

JÓN ÞORÐARSON THÓRODDSEN

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BY

ARTHUR M. REEVES

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PREFACE

JÓN ÞÓRÐARSON THÓRODDSEN, the author of *Piltur og Stúlka* (*Lad and Lass*), was born at the farmstead of Reykhólar on Reykjaness, in Bardastrand-shire, Western Iceland, in the autumn of 1819. He was sent as a lad to the Icelandic High School at Bessastad, and when he had completed the course of study at this school, he sailed (in the summer of 1841) to Copenhagen, to pursue his studies at the University. He continued to reside in Denmark for nine years, visiting his native land but twice in the interval. In 1850 he returned to Iceland, and made his home there during the remainder of his life. He received an appointment to a local office soon after his return to his fatherland, and was continuously in office thenceforward, being shireman of Borgarfirth-shire at the time of his death in 1868.

During his residence in Copenhagen Thóroddsen wrote several poems, which appeared in various periodicals, a number of them in an Icelandic annual (*Norðurfari*), in the editing of which Thóroddsen

was associated with another of Iceland's talented sons, Gísli Brynjúlfsson. In the winter of 1848-49 he wrote the story of *Piltur og Stúlka*, which was published in Copenhagen a year later. Of this work the learned Icelandic statesman, the late Jón Sigurðsson, says, in the introduction to an incomplete work of Thóroddsen's which was published posthumously: "Various attempts had been made in our country before this (*i.e.* before the appearance of *Piltur og Stúlka*) to compose works of fiction similar to those which had appeared in foreign lands in modern times, and which are called in English 'novels,' because they draw their material from modern everyday life, and not from ancient events or historical writings, as do the knightly romances; but this story of Jón Thóroddsen's is the most important of all these tales, and is hence universally conceded to be the first Icelandic novel," which, it may be added, it still remains in point of merit.

In 1867 a second edition of *Piltur og Stúlka* was published in Reykjavík, in which the following epilogue was printed: "The same year, 1850, in which I was wedded to the helm of authority and became a tax-gatherer, on a bough (the word *kvist* has the double signification of 'bough' and 'garret,' and the pun refers to the author's poverty) in Copenhagen a bird was born. The father made acknowledgment of his paternity, and was called J. Þ. Thóroddsen. He caused it to be sprinkled with water, so that it could swim, in Möller's printing-

office. The name given to the new-born was *Piltur og Stúlka*, and when the bird was sufficiently strong for the journey, and was able to fly, it flew to the home of its father, Iceland, and offered itself in competition with southern birds, saying that it was as well-born as they, and was as familiar with the lie of the land. The lads and lasses of Iceland seemed to be better acquainted with the Icelandic twitter than with that of some of the summer birds from the south, which are wearied and exhausted, and altered by their erratic wanderings and flights hither and thither up and down the globe. The father of *Lad and Lass* asks you, lads and lasses, to receive with equal favour the bird which, with slight change of plumage, now wings to you again."

In 1871 the Icelandic Literary Society published a collection of Thóroddsen's poems (*Kvæði eftir Jón Thóroddsen*, Kaupmannahöfn, 1871), many of which are of great beauty, and have won a place for their author among the first of modern Icelandic poets. Thóroddsen's second novel was published by the Icelandic Literary Society in 1876. This novel, *Maður og Kona* (*Man and Wife*), was left by its author, at his death, in an unfinished state, but was edited and completed by the Society before it was published. It has never been translated. *Piltur og Stúlka* has, on the other hand, been twice translated into Danish,¹ and more recently into

¹ An English translation of one of these Danish translations has been published.

German. In the present translation the effort has been to preserve not only the significance but the diction of the original, which in no small degree is conceived in the rugged simplicity of style of the old Icelandic literature. A poem of questionable taste has been omitted ; it is not essential to the narrative, and is fairly honoured in the breach. In the second edition of the story the "change of plumage," to which the author alludes in his epilogue, is an interpolation of several pages descriptive of Indrid and Sigrid's wedding, and of the family life of Gudmund of Burfell after his marriage to an extravagant merchant's daughter. It not only mars the symmetry of the tale as it appears in the first edition, but is, in the judgment of critical Icelanders, of decidedly inferior literary merit, and it has therefore been omitted from the translation, which conforms, for the most part, to the original edition. With the exceptions noted, I have taken no intentional liberties with the text of the original.

This translation, originally made several years ago, I have recently had an opportunity to review with an Icelandic friend, Dr. Valtýr Guðmundsson, and have endeavoured, in the printed text, to profit by his criticism. To him I owe my acknowledgments, while I am also indebted to his fellow-countryman, Mr. Bogi Th. Melsteð, for the explanation of "Alkort," which is given in translation in the note.

THE TRANSLATOR.

GENEVA, *September* 1889.

LAD AND LASS

I

IN eastern Iceland is a broad and beautiful district called —, the scene of the following tale. Although this district is well peopled, its farmsteads were far more numerous in the days of Hall of Side.¹ Now,

¹ A renowned chieftain in the days of the Icelandic republic, whose home was in south-eastern Iceland on the shores of the Alpta-firth. In the year 997 King Olaf Tryggvason sent one Dankbrand, a priest of German origin, to Iceland to convert the people to Christianity. Dankbrand landed in the Alpta-firth, and during the first winter made his home with Hall of Side. It was not until toward the end of Dankbrand's stay that his arguments and persuasive efforts began to win Hall to the new religion. The Icelandic chieftain, however, insisted upon tangible evidence of the efficacy of baptism, before he would consent to abandon his heathen superstitions. There were in his household two aged women who were feeble and ailing; upon these Hall stipulated that the priest should first practise his baptismal rites, and if they should appear to be benefited thereby, he would then himself consent to be baptized. The experiment resulted successfully for the priest, and Hall and his entire household were baptized forthwith in a brook near the house, to which Dankbrand gave the name of Thvattá, *i.e.* the Wash—more euphemistically, the baptismal stream—by which name Hall's home has ever since been known. The influence of so renowned a leader as Hall was most valuable to Dankbrand in his mission, and aided him greatly in effecting the conversion of many other of the leading men of the land. Hall,

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for the most part, low green mounds alone mark the spots where, according to the Sagas, the well-built manor-houses stood. Although there is abundant evidence of the truth of the Saga statements, we have not a suggestion as to the causes which have wrought the change. Indeed those who write and have written concerning the country's needs and its resources are by no means agreed amongst themselves upon an explanation. Some think that the fair farmsteads have fallen into disuse because of the incapacity of the inhabitants, and they maintain that the land is now as "fair and fine" as in the olden time when the Norsemen came to dwell upon its shores, vast tracts of the land being still habitable which now, lie desolate. Others there are who find in the drift-ice and scarcity of timber reasons why the land should be more sparsely peopled now than it was in the tenth and eleventh centuries; these say, that at that time there was no drift-ice, that the country was wooded from the mountains to the sea, and that building-timber could be

despite his early scepticism, became a devout believer and aided materially in the establishment of Christianity in the island. His speech at the battle of the Great Moot, in the year 1012, struck a fatal blow at the old institutions of the blood-feud and weregild and marked the beginning of a new era in the history of the land. His son Ljot had been killed in the battle, and Hall, according to the prevailing custom, was entitled to weregild for his loss. After the battle he thus addressed the assembly: "All men know what a grief I have suffered in the loss of my son Ljot; many will think that he would be valued dearest of those men who have fallen here; but I will do this for the sake of an atonement. I will put no price on my son, and yet will come forward and grant both pledges and peace to those who are my adversaries. I beg thee Snorri the Priest, and others of the best men, to bring this about that there may be a reconciliation between us." The address and history of the event are to be found in *Njála*, chap. cxlv., pp. 348, 349, Copenhagen, 1875, or in Sir George Webbe Dasent's translation of the Saga; *Story of Burnt Njal*, vol. ii. p. 281.

everywhere obtained. There may be somewhat of truth in each of these theories ; it is not, however, for us to decide this controversy here, for this little book is to treat of another subject.

Up from the region of which we have spoken reaches a broad and extensive valley called ——dale, out from which open two lesser valleys which we will call the Fairdales. The eastern Fairdale is thickly grown with willow coppice and carpeted with grass ; the soil is very fertile here, but the winters are rather severe. The valley is straight as an arrow, the mountains at its sides are not high, and their almost rockless slopes are covered with green throughout the summer ; here and there little brooks and narrow ravines branch out down the mountain slopes, on each side of the deep but not over-broad glacier river which flows placidly through the mid-valley. He who should stand at the head of the valley and look down it in the early morning, in clear summer weather, when the sun is rising and the shadows are slowly dissolving before its bright rays, could scarce withhold the words, "Fair art thou valley of my Fatherland, here would I fain live and die !"

There are six farmsteads in the eastern Fairdale ; the two which are at the head of the valley are called Indridholl and Sigridtung, and are situated almost opposite each other on different sides of the river. There was little intercourse between these farms ; each had its own parish, and each was in a different commune. There are but few places in the valley where the river can be forded. In severe winter weather it freezes over, but even this did not lead to an exchange of visits, for the reason that the farmers were not especially good friends ; each looked after his own

affairs, and mingled most with the people of his own parish. There were no neighbour's quarrels between the two farmers, for the river drew the boundary line so sharply and distinctly between their farms that it was impossible for disputes to arise touching the boundaries of their meadows and pasture lands, which are apt to be "rocks of offence" between near neighbours in Iceland; but the fates had so willed it, that the proprietor of Indridholl was overseer in his parish, and he who dwelt at Sigridtung was likewise an overseer.¹ Now, although men may be most exemplary in their own dealings with each other, it often happens that in the adjustment of parish affairs they do not agree, and it has long been a common saying, that the care of paupers may sunder parish overseers, but never unites them, and thus it befell in this instance. For a long time the two overseers had followed their

¹ Icel. *hreppstjóri*, literally, Rape-steerer, *i.e.* the steward or overseer of a Rape or commune. The Rape is in this case the poor-law district into which the bailiwicks or shires (Icel. *sýslur*) are divided, and its boundaries are usually identical with those of the parish to which its people belong. At the head of affairs in Iceland is the governor-general (Icel. *landshöfðingi*, literally, head of the land) whose home is in Reykjavik, the capital and principal town. He is the ambassador of the King of Denmark, and next below him in office are the two *amtmenn* (superior magistrates), having general police and legal jurisdiction in the northern and southern shires of the country respectively. The island is divided into *sýslur*, *i.e.* bailiwicks, prefectures or shires, whose chief officers are *sýslumenn*, *i.e.* bailiffs or sheriffs, these are the tax-gatherers, preside over the county courts and have in general the care of their respective bailiwicks. The shires, as already stated, are divided into communes, or poor-law districts, and the overseers of these have the care of the poor, the levying of poor-rates, and are in general the deputies of the bailiff of the shire of which the communes or rapes form a part. These parish overseers are usually the most substantial yeomen in their districts; they now receive a small salary, but did not at the time this book was written.

respective paths of life and official duty in friendliness and peace, each with the other, until at last there came a stumbling-stone in the way in the shape of a superannuated old crone ; no one could tell where she came into the world, and she herself had no positive knowledge as to what she had heard concerning this. So they set about ransacking the "holy writ," that is to say, the church registers of the parishes of Sigridtung and Indridholl, and then the matter became complicated in real earnest. In the church register of Indridholl parish a name was found, the first letter of which greatly resembled the first letter in the old woman's name, but the rest of the name, which had been written in Icelandic ling-ink, had faded out. Upon such equivocal testimony as this, the farmers of Indridholl parish were not disposed to concede the justice of the old crone's claims for relief from their poor fund. In the Tung parish church register there was a lacuna of a hundred years, and the people of that parish said, that from the testimony of the church registers it was quite as likely that she was not entitled to relief from *their* parish fund. It was therefore determined to refer the whole matter to the chief officer of the shire for arbitrament, and each overseer wrote to him accordingly. The referee was himself much at a loss how to decide the dispute, but it would not do to let the matter rest thus, and the overseer of Sigridtung escaped from the dilemma, by bundling the old woman off to Indridholl parish with the assistance of his parishioners. The overseer there, acting promptly, collected his people and had her carried back whip and spur to Sigridtung. The house door at Sigridtung was locked when the party was seen approaching, and the overseer forbade any one to attempt to open it. The Holl parish folk

deposited the old woman on the pavement in front of the house, but for some time after their departure the door remained unopened. It was the middle of Advent, and the weather was rather cold, especially for old people, so that when they went out at last to the old woman they found her chilled through. Overseer Biarni said that it would be best to warm a swallow of milk and give her this before they started back again with her. "Send me whither ye list, good people," said the old woman, "but God forgive the king who sits now drinking coffee and brandy, and does n't know what is happening here!" These were her last words in this world.

It did not happen with the overseers as with Herod and Pilate aforetime, that they became friends from that day when the old woman was sent from the one to the other; the wound which their stubbornness had caused never after wholly healed; they often met, it is true, at public gatherings, and raised their hats to each other, not, however, as a token of friendliness, but merely out of deference to their official dignity; they exchanged letters from time to time about this or that, concerning the affairs of their communes, and they occasionally talked together, never failing at such times to call each other "Signor"¹ at every other word, moved to this not so much by good motives as because each reasoned to himself,

¹ This use of "Signor" was the title accorded, at the time *Lad and Lass* was written, to the office of overseer, ceremoniously, but by no means generally. The people of Iceland have no title corresponding to our *Mr.*, and a man is addressed by his name alone, or by the title attaching to the office he holds. *Strá* (commonly pronounced *Sjera*), the English *Sir*, was first used in Iceland and Norway toward the end of the thirteenth century as a priest's title, and is still thus used in Iceland, the clergyman being

"If I fail to call him 'Signor,' I shall certainly cast a doubt upon my own claim to the title."

The wives of the overseers were only slightly acquainted, but they rarely missed an opportunity to question guests and wayfarers about each other, a solicitude not so much inspired by goodwill as by a secret jealousy, and because neither of them wished to be eclipsed by the other,¹ as they were both of equal social rank. The overseers were both well-to-do men. Indridholl belonged to John, while Sigridtung was Crown land; here overseer Biarni had lived during his farmer-life, and although he owned no land he was well-to-do in flocks and chattels.

John of Holl had one son called Indrid, who had turned his tenth year at the period of which this tale now treats. Indrid was a handsome, well-grown boy, and was believed to be stronger than other boys of his age, for his mother had not fed him on husks; milk was never so scarce at Holl that Indrid failed to get his bowl of new milk, morning and evening—ah, but that put the marrow in his bones! He was sprightly and clever beyond his years in everything except learning the Catechism, though he had now so far progressed in this task that he had memorised all but the seventh chapter, which is apt to prove difficult for most persons. Indrid was never so happy as when he had something to whittle; his next greatest pleasure was in tending his father's flocks. He was keen of sight

usually addressed by his first name preceded by the titular *Síra*. The word *Herra*, which is properly a part of the episcopal title, and can only be applied to the Christian name, is, latterly, used somewhat indiscriminately, in writing, and when thus used corresponds to the Danish *Herre*, German *Herr*; it has not, however, come into use in conversation.

¹ Lit. "to be a ship's after-boat to the other."

and swift of foot, and luckier than most shepherds, often being able to find missing sheep when others had abandoned the search. He was the owner of a pied brown ewe, which had been given him when he cut his first tooth; this was the most fortunate of creatures, regularly giving birth to twin lambs every spring, wherefore it was said that great prosperity was in store for Indrid. The boy sold the lambs every autumn and gave the money to his mother for safe keeping. The ewe had now grown so old and feeble, that she was no longer able to follow the flocks to pasture, nor could she eat enough grass to keep life in her body, even in midsummer; but as Indrid had resolved that she should die of old age, she was carried in and laid on the floor of the living room, where she was fed on milk through a tube like a child, and only placed on the slope in front of the house when the weather was fine and mild.

Biarni and Ingveld of Sigridtung had three children. The eldest, Ragnheid, was married to a farmer of the neighbourhood. Their second child, a son, called Orm, his father wished to have educated for a profession, and he therefore studied during the winter with the parson, but spent the summer with his parents. His mother, who loved him devotedly, had formed the desire that Orm should become a clergyman, and the boy had scarce learned Latin enough to be able to connect two words together faultlessly, when she began to reckon and compare the incomes of the best livings with which she was acquainted, with a view to determine for which her Orm should apply. The youngest child of the couple at Sigridtung was called Sigrid; this had been the farmer's mother's name, and she was her father's

favourite, but was by no means a pet with her mother ; she suffered, indeed, in her mother's esteem for that which endeared her especially to her father—that is to say, on account of her name and her striking resemblance to her paternal grandmother. Ingveld often said to herself when she looked at the child, “Is n't it just as if that old wretch of a mother-in-law was before me in the flesh again ?”

II

WE are now come to that summer when it was Indrid of Holl's task to collect and drive the milch-ewes to the sheep-walk in the morning and tend them during the day. The pastures for the ewes at Holl are up toward the head of the valley, the common-pastures¹ being still farther beyond. The milch-ewes were pastured up about the green ledges, and here Indrid watched them, and never a sheep escaped him. He found it difficult to wake betimes in the morning, and his father, forsooth, was wont to rouse him at first without much ceremony, but toward the haying season, when the sheep were not so much inclined to wander, Indrid had become accustomed to rise in good season.

It happened one morning at Sigridtung, when they had begun to mow the home meadow,² that a heavy

¹ The grazing lands where the wethers and lambs belonging to the different farmers of the district feed together during the summer.

² The home meadow, or that part of the meadow about the farm buildings which is usually enclosed by a wall of turf or stone, is called in Icelandic *tún*, our *town*; the word used with the same signification which attaches to the Icelandic word is found in Scott's *Waverley*, chap. ix., "He has done naething but dance up and down about the *toun*, without doing a single turn," etc. The surface of the Icelandic *tún* is never smooth, but is ridged with countless mounds or

dew had made the mowing good, and farmer Biarni, returning to the house from his work in the hay-field, found his son Orm still asleep. It was past nine o'clock, and Biarni said to his wife: "Our beloved Orm seems to be late rising; I should think you would call him for breakfast; he is n't good for much of anything but eating. The boy is now sixteen years old and does n't know yet how to handle a scythe. I dare say most people would think him big enough to shave a little off a mound or so, especially when everybody else about him has some work to do."

"Oh yes! he does enjoy his nap of a morning, poor fellow; besides he was cut out for something else in this world beyond mowing in the home meadow with the men."

"Bide a bit, wife! The boy has n't taken orders yet, and I've noticed that not every one who is taught becomes a clergyman."

"If I was n't certain that my Orm would become a clergyman," said Ingveld, "I should n't have egged you on so to have him taught, but I trust the good God will hear my prayers, and make a clergyman of him, and let him get a good living somewhere here near to us. Do you think it will be necessary for him then, to wear himself out mowing?"

hummocks somewhat similar to the so-called "boggy land" of wet prairies, though in an exaggerated way. The Icelandic *tún* is covered with these small grave-like mounds separated by narrow gullies, and, as may be imagined, it is no easy matter to cut the grass from the home meadow with a scythe—indeed a sickle is usually employed for this purpose. This curious tendency to mound formation, probably caused by the combined action of water and frost, is a common cause of complaint among the better class of Icelandic farmers; it might possibly be overcome by levelling and under-draining the meadow-lands, but as no grain is raised, the expense might not be justified for grass culture alone.

"No, it is n't a question of necessity, but there would n't be any shame or disgrace in his knowing how to work ; however this is n't the first time by any means that you are ready to apologise for the boy."

"Just as you do for Sigga."¹

"Why, the little one is only a child ; it's hardly to be expected that she should be able to accomplish much."

"She could at least watch the sheep during the day, the hussy ! I had to at her age, and besides I need Gudrun to help here about the house."

The pair bickered together over this for some time, and the end of the matter was that Orm went out with his father to the meadow, where a few mound tops were selected for him to practise upon ; while little Sigrid, somewhat troubled in mind, had for the first time to trudge along the path behind the sheep, with her little wooden lunch bowl² in her hand. She was then in her ninth year, and rather small for her age. Before she set out from the house her mother whispered to her, "You will get a sound whipping, you hussy, if you come home too early in the evening, or lose any of the sheep !" The maid, Gudrun, was sent with her to show her where she should let the sheep graze. "Do n't cry, lassy," said Gudrun ; "you need n't be afraid of the fairies in the valley, they won't hurt you." The only effect of which

¹ Diminutive for Sigrid.

² Icel. *askr*, a small round wooden vessel, usually provided with a handle and an attached cover, which is frequently ornamented with quaint carving. The *ask* is used as a bowl for porridge, or other food, and also as a milk-pail ; it and the horn spoon, the handle of which is generally carved, and usually bears the owner's name, or some quotation, are to the foreigner the most novel of Icelandic household utensils.

words of comfort was to call up before Sigrid all the tales, she had ever heard about Elf-hill and Ghost-dale, two famous localities in the valley. In a short time the sheep had reached the end of the path, and when they came to the broad green slopes they began to scatter out over the knolls and hollows, and to nibble the blossomy grass.

"You must let the sheep stop here during the day, Sigga," said Gudrun, "and you must take care that they do n't get out of your sight over the ridge. You can let them wander anywhere along the slope, but you must watch that they do n't stay huddled together, for if they do they won't give as much milk. When the shadow gets down to the hollow over yonder, you must begin to call them together, and be very careful that you do n't leave any behind in the ravines. You will have to keep a close watch on that big ewe with the spotted face ; she generally tries to sneak off up the glen there ; she has played that trick on me twice, so that I had to chase up the mountain after her, the good-for-nothing. Do n't set Lubbi¹ on the ewes too often, he sometimes snaps at them ; and now, good-bye !"

"Oh, please do n't leave me just yet, Gunna dear !" cried the child, half choking ; "I shall surely die of fright here all alone."

"Do n't be a cry-baby !" said Gudrun, tearing herself away, and running off as fast as her legs would carry her, so that she was out of sight in an instant.

Little Sigrid's breast was so oppressed with grief that it seemed to her it would surely burst ; the tears coursed down her little cheeks, it grew black before her eyes, her limbs refused to support her body,

¹ A shaggy-haired dog.

she dropped upon the spot, and cowering upon the ground she cried as if her heart would break. At last, wearied with weeping, she fell asleep, and dreamed that a man clad all in white came to her, and stroking her eyes, said, "Jesus comforts good little children who weep." At this she awoke, and fell to rubbing her cheeks, when she found that they were no longer moist, but felt sore and very hot; she had a slight headache, but her breast was freer, and her heart no longer throbbed with grief, although tears still glistened in the little blue eyes. Any one coming into the little hollow where Sigrid sat, and looking into her eyes then, would surely have said to himself: "How does it happen that the blessed sun, which has been shining here the livelong day, has not been able to dry the dew-pearls in these two violets, the fairest of any here upon the slope?" The fear and foreboding with which little Sigrid had been overcome before she fell asleep had vanished for the most part, or had ceased to have the same effect upon her, for she was now thinking of her dream. She seated herself upon the slope and began to say her prayers, repeating them again and again, and thus comforting herself somewhat. She had been thus occupied for a time, when she seemed to hear, all at once, a noise, like the barking of a dog, on the other side of the valley; whereupon she sprang to her feet, and running up on a hillock, hard by, looked about her. All was quiet and peaceful in the valley; the sun had sunk low in the heavens, and the shades of evening, descending the western mountain-slopes, had almost reached the hollow. Sigrid saw then that she must have been sleeping a long time, and she remembered what Gudrun had said to her about

driving the sheep together when the shadow should reach the hollow. While she was still thinking of this, she happened to glance across the river at a little grassy valley in the centre of which was a small knoll with a gray stone upon its summit, and it seemed to Sigrid that a boy clad in black came out of it, and vanished up the valley in the twinkling of an eye. Sigrid was so alarmed at this strange apparition, that she was anxious to escape from the valley as speedily as possible, and her heart began to flutter in her breast with fear, but at the same instant she heard a sheep-call on the opposite side of the valley, so loud that it wakened the echoes in the mountains on both sides of the stream. Sigrid's dog, Lubbi, had been lying during the day on the slope, not far from Sigrid, with his head resting on his paws, but he no sooner heard the echoes of the sheep-call reverberating in the cliffs, than he sprang up, shook himself, pricked up his ears, and then dashing off, was out of Sigrid's sight in an instant. The sheep bounded out from the grassy edges of the ravines, and scampered together in a huddle close by the foot of the slope. Sigrid speedily ran her eye over the flock, and satisfied herself that there were none missing. While she was thus engaged, the evening shadows reached the hollow, and she therefore proceeded to drive the sheep home, arriving with the flock at the fold at just the hour in the evening when they were wont to milk, and as there was not a ewe missing, every one thought that Sigrid had made a remarkably good beginning as a shepherdess.

The next day, when the time came for Sigrid to set out with the sheep, she was by no means so loath to go as she had been the day before; yet, all the way, she could not succeed in banishing from her

thoughts remembrances of the elf-folk in the valley, and of the jet-black boy whom she had seen the previous day. When she arrived at the slope where she had been the day before, she seated herself, and folding her hands began to say her prayers. She had been thus occupied for some time when she looked across the river and saw a flock of sheep scampering along the opposite bank, and, following a short distance behind the flock, a little boy of the same height as the one she had seen the day before, but this boy was differently dressed, for he wore light-coloured trousers, a black jacket, and had a striped cap on his head. Sigrid stared at him for some moments, and then said to herself, "Surely this boy cannot be an elf-child; it must be some little shepherd boy." From the slope where Sigrid sat it was but a short distance to the river, which at this point was not broad, but flowed between two jutting crags. Sigrid walked out upon the projecting cliff and stood looking across the stream. The sheep, browsing as they walked, moved slowly forward a short distance in advance of the boy, who, when he came opposite to where Sigrid stood by the river, glanced across, and seeing a little girl standing there, stopped and stared at her for some time, then running out on the river-bank he called over to Sigrid and asked her name.

"My name is Sigga Biarni's daughter."¹

¹ With few exceptions the men and women of Iceland have no family name. They take as a surname the Christian name of the father, adding to it as a part of the name the word son or daughter. Sigrid's name would be written *Sigríður Bjarnadóttir*, *i.e.* Sigrid the daughter of Biarni; Indrid would write his name *Indriði Jónsson*, *i.e.* Indrid the son of John. Frequently, however, an individual is known by his Christian name coupled either with his place of residence or with a nickname obtained by reason of some well-known peculiarity of the owner.

"Do you have to tend the sheep over at Tung?"

"I have to stay and watch them; but what is your name?"

"My name is Indrid of Holl, and I have to watch the sheep just like you."

"Do n't you get tired watching them all by yourself?"

"Oh no! not so very when the weather is good; but where is your house?"

"Why, I have n't any house out here yet; have you a house?"

"Yes, just over here in the dell. I stay there during the day and carve. It is large enough for both of us to get in it at the same time and stand up straight. It's a pity you can't come over here with me, so we could play together, for I see you are as little as I. Do n't you get very tired during the day without any house?"

"Yes, I get awfully tired," said Sigrid, "and besides I am so very much afraid of the elf-folk, which they say there are here in the valley."

"I do n't believe there are any elf-folk here," said Indrid; "have you seen anything of them?"

"Yes, yesterday I saw an ugly little black fellow slip out of that gray stone which stands over there in the dell."

"Why, that is n't a gray stone! that is my house there on the knoll, my pet! It was I, most likely, whom you saw; but I must go now and drive the sheep a little farther up. I'll be back soon again though, for I like to talk with you very much."

This was Indrid's and Sigrid's first conversation; after this, however, they saw and talked with each other by the river every day, and it was not long before

they had grown to be the best of friends. Every morning when they came with the sheep to the pasture, they went out on the ledges, on the opposite sides of the river, exchanged greetings, and told each other the news. During the day, when the weather was fine, they sat and talked together across the river, told each other stories, vied at capping verses,¹ and enjoyed each other's society greatly. Sigrid cried when Indrid was sometimes later than usual in arriving with his flock, but danced and skipped with joy when she saw him coming; and Indrid likewise began to find the hours very long and wearisome when Sigrid was out of his sight.

Thus the summer passed, and Sigrid had become so fond of minding the sheep that she could scarcely be contented anywhere except in the valley, and every morning was all impatience to set out. One day in the autumn her father said to her that she would no longer be required to tend the sheep, as thenceforward

¹ This is a favourite amusement with Icelandic children. The play is commenced by one of the contestants repeating the verse :

Komdú nú að kveðast á,
Kappi, ef þú getur,
Láttú ganga ljóða skrá
Ljóst í allan vetur.

Come thou, now, and rhyme with me,
Fellow, if thou darest !
All the winter give I thee,
An' thou rhymes preparest.

To this the opponent replies with a verse beginning with the last letter of the previous verse, to which the first rhymster replies similarly in turn. If one fails, the other has to repeat seven verses beginning in each case with the last letter of the previous verse, which, if it be successfully accomplished, entitles him to the meed of victory. The sport can be carried on at great length by clever children, with the aid of the innumerable *rímur*, or epical paraphrases of the Sagas, which most children in Iceland begin to learn at a very early age.

the ewes would be milked but once a day. This intelligence was by no means grateful to Sigrid, but she asked her father to permit her to go out to the valley during the day to fetch certain small treasures which she had left behind, and to take leave of her friend Indrid. Her father gave his consent, and Sigrid, as was her custom, went out to the ledge above the river to wait for Indrid, but that very day they had ceased to graze the sheep at Holl, and Indrid failed to come. Sigrid waited a long time, but was at last obliged to return with her wish ungratified, and took her leave of the valley with almost as great distress of mind as when she first went thither to watch the sheep.

III

SIGRID and Indrid did not meet the next winter, and the following summer, although it had been intended that Sigrid should act as shepherdess, she was prevented by a malady which affected her right foot, and which was very slow in healing, so that she was confined to her bed the greater part of the summer. Nor did Indrid of Holl tend the sheep that summer, for he displayed so much talent and ability for all kinds of work, that his father had decided that he would be more useful at home helping with the haying than acting as shepherd, and a young girl, not so clever as he, was accordingly selected to take his place, although Indrid still gathered the milch-ewes together in the morning. Thus the summer lapsed, until the time came for collecting the sheep from the remote common pastures.¹

¹ The Icelandic farmers retain during the summer such milch-ewes as they need, and turn out the remainder of their flocks to graze until autumn on the moors and mountain pastures. Every farmer has a peculiar ear-mark for his sheep, an odd cut or series of cuts in one or both ears. These ear-marks are catalogued and registered, and correspond to the cattle-brands of the herdsmen of the Western Prairies. In the autumn the flocks are all collected from the remote common pastures and driven to the *réttir* or sheepfolds belonging to the communes. The *réttir* is a large enclosure with low walls of stone or turf, surrounded by lesser pens

These grazing lands, used in common by the farmers of the district, lay, as has been previously stated, up about the head of Fairdale. The farmers of Holl parish and Tung parish owned jointly a large sheepfold in the valley, and each farmer was required to furnish men to aid in collecting and driving the sheep to this fold. Overseer John's flocks were large, and he therefore sent three of his people to assist in the search, one of whom was his son, Indrid. The day appointed for the search was fine, and many people from the district had gathered at the fold, as it was a favourite occasion in the neighbourhood for such gatherings. The people had brought tents and provisions with them, as the day on which the sheep are collected seldom suffices to accomplish the separation and distribution among the various owners. At about three o'clock in the afternoon most of those who had joined in the search had returned. The sheep, already collected, scattered over the valley, and the people sought their provision-bags, seated

which open from it. The sheep, called in Icelandic *kindur*, as they are collected are driven into the large enclosure, and divided from it, according to the ear-marks, into the pens surrounding it, whence they are driven home by their respective owners. These meetings take place from the middle to the end of September in all parts of the country, and the *Réttir* or *righting* season is a general holiday time and season of merrymaking among the farmers and their families, who assemble at the folds from the neighbouring country. To the modern Icelandic word for sheep, *kindur*, pronounced like the German word for children, a favourite Icelandic anecdote owes its origin. The Icelandic Bishop Gudbrand was upon one occasion entertained at Court in Copenhagen, when the German-speaking queen inquired how many children (*Kinder*) he had, to which the good bishop replied, "Three hundred." The queen, much amazed at the size of the family, asked how he managed to provide for so many, when, to her horror, she was informed by the worthy man of God, that every autumn he killed a third of them and ate them.

themselves, and fell to eating, and waited for those who had not yet arrived. Thus the afternoon lapsed into evening, when the only one missing was the overseer's son, Indrid. The men concluded that he had lost his way, and were beginning to discuss the advisability of going in search of him, when, all at once, a barking of dogs was heard above the brow of the northern fells, and shortly thereafter a flock of sheep was descried; Indrid was come at last with a large flock. He had been directed to make his search in a little valley branching out from the head of Fairdale, but finding no sheep there, and feeling that he would be disgraced if he should abandon the search thus, and return sheepless to the folds, he had continued around the western side of the mountain to the shores of a large lake, where he discovered a great number of sheep, and with these had turned back, having, however, completely run through both shoes and stockings.¹ As the day was now so far spent, it was not deemed advisable to begin the distribution of the sheep, and the folk retired to their tents to await the morrow. The following morning the weather was clear, and the men arose betimes, and began to separate the sheep. A great number of people assembled from the neighbouring country, among these was little Sigrid from Tung, who came with her mother and looked on while the sheep were being distributed, or joined in play with other little girls. Indrid, who was wandering hither and thither with the other lads, chanced to come to the spot where the little girls were playing together, and his eye soon

¹ Icelandic shoes are usually made of sun-tanned sheep and seal skin; they are mere flexible slippers, not unlike the Indian moccasins, and are generally provided with knitted woollen insoles.

fell upon Sigrid, whom he immediately recognised. At the same moment Sigrid caught sight of Indrid, and was no less quick of memory than he. With one impulse the two ran toward each other, and meeting midway, kissed. Indrid, however, was the first to speak.

"I know you, you dear little girl," he said; "you live at Tung and your name is Sigga. I am awfully fond of you."

"I am just as awfully fond of you, little Indrid! I remember you from last year, and I have n't seen you for so long!"

This brief colloquy was filled with that earnestness and sincerity with which children alone are endowed, evidencing the purity and innocence of their minds, and he must long have trodden in the path of evil who, seeing these children, would not have thought to himself, "Oh that I might again become as a child in heart; then should I have no need to conceal my thoughts from the eyes of men!"

Indrid, taking Sigrid by the hand, said, "Let me take you to my mother, for I have often told her about you and how much I like you."

So they both went together to Ingeborg, who kissed Sigrid again and again, called her a sweet child, and bade Indrid be very kind to her.

Meanwhile the young men who were gathered about the folds had unanimously decided to hold a wrestling match¹ out on the plain, in which all the lads of suffi-

¹ Wrestling matches find frequent mention in Icelandic literature from the first recorded bout between Thor and the giantess Ella (Age), described in the Edda. The sport continues in as great favour with the modern Icelanders as with their ancestors, and seems to have been preserved with very little change from Saga times. The wrestlers are divided by lot, and the one side endeavours to wrestle "down" the other. The antagonists seize

cient size were to take part ; among those selected were Indrid and Orm of Tung. The contestants were divided into two parties ; those from Tung parish forming one side, those from Holl parish the other. Each side chose a leader, and the members then arranging themselves in a row, fixed the order in which they should wrestle : those were to wrestle first who were weakest, then the more able-bodied, and finally the leaders themselves. The wrestling grounds were selected, the boundaries fixed, and the match began, while the women and such of the older men as were not engaged in dividing the sheep in the fold sat near by looking on and greatly enjoying the sport. At the outset the Tung parish party fared ill ; then Orm of Tung went forward, and against him was pitted a man from the Holl parish clan called Biarni. They had struggled together but a few minutes when Orm inserted his leg between those of his antagonist, and thus raising him from his feet, hurled him at full length on the ground. Orm had vanquished two others of the Holl parish men in turn, when a new man arose from the opposing faction, one Thorgrim, nicknamed the Troll, a tall burly fellow. He rushed angrily at Orm, and seizing him, whirled him round as if he had been a spindle ; the difference in strength was evident, but Orm was agile and sure of foot and held his ground, and his antagonist soon discovered that he was not to be overcome so easily as he had anticipated. They

each other by the waist-band of the trousers with the right hand, and with the left grasp the trouser's leg below the hip, then pulling with the arms or delivering sudden unexpected strokes with feet or legs, each seeks to bring the other to earth. There are many feints and tricks known to the expert wrestler, and success is more frequently the result of agility than of mere strength.

struggled together for some time, when Thorgrim began to give evidence of exhaustion; this Orm was prompt to discover, and immediately redoubled the energy of his attack, but in vain. Thorgrim stood as immovable as a rock imbedded in the earth, and Orm found that it was useless to adventure his wrestling sleights upon his adversary with any hope of success. Thorgrim, wearied with this fumbling, relaxed his hold upon Orm, intending to seize him around the back, but Orm, more nimble than his opponent, improved the opportunity thus afforded to leap in under him, and throwing him across his hip, speedily brought him to earth. This victory was greeted with prolonged applause by the Tung parish folk, and praises of Orm's valour and prowess were heard on every side. Orm now advanced on the field, and cried: "A valiant hero have we laid low on these plains. Whom do you intend to send forth now, you Holl parishers?"—"Our champion is neither tall, nor stout," was the reply; "it is little Indrid's turn in the struggle; it won't be difficult for you to vanquish him."

Indrid went forward, and he and Orm joined with each other. Indrid, although not so stout as Orm, was, nevertheless, so agile that Orm sought in vain to get him from off his feet; moreover he soon became exhausted, being still weary from the previous struggle. Near the outer edge of the wrestling field, to which they came in the course of the struggle, was a mound which Orm did not notice. Indrid sprang backwards over this, and at the same time jerked Orm suddenly toward him, so that the latter lost his foothold and fell forward on one knee, whereat the Holl parish folk set up a great laugh, and cried,

"A little mound may overturn a great load." Orm was much chagrined at the result of the encounter, and wanted to have another trial with Indrid; but to this the Holl party would not agree, as they claimed that the first bout had been a full and fair one. After this each pair wrestled, as appointed, until there were none left excepting the leaders. These fought long and sturdily, until at last they both fell at the same time. The sport had been greatly enjoyed by every one except Ingveld of Tung, who was sorely vexed that Orm should have succumbed to Indrid. "Why did you let the little scoundrel throw you?" said she, "or rather, why don't you make him pay for it?" Orm replied that he did not think it becoming to bear malice long for such a trivial matter.

"You may depend upon it I sha' n't forget it this evening," said Ingveld; "indeed it is n't much less of a disgrace for me than for you, for it looks as if I had been so niggardly as never to have given you enough to eat," and with this their conversation ended.

While the young men had been wrestling, the work of distribution had been carried on by the men, and the time had now come for the farmers of the immediate neighbourhood to select their sheep; for they always waited until the last, while those who lived at a distance picked out their sheep first. There was a man at the fold named Asbiorn, who was so good a judge of sheep that he always knew any animal that he had ever seen before; moreover he knew the private sheep-mark belonging to every man in the two adjoining shires. He always stood at the entrance to the fold, examining every sheep as it was

brought forward, and deciding to whom it belonged, and no one ever thought of disputing his decision. Whenever any misunderstanding arose between the farmers concerning the ear-marks, Asbiorn was always selected as referee, for he was universally regarded as being quite as good an authority as the printed catalogue of private marks. When the wrestling match came to an end, the work at the fold was prosecuted with renewed activity.

"I do not know who owns this sheep," exclaimed Asbiorn, scrutinising the ears of a two-year-old ewe. "Somebody call the overseer from Tung. It all depends on whether this was a cut here; it looks to me, men, as if there had been a scar in the ear! What do you say, John of Lækjamot? The principal mark is certainly that of the overseer at Tung—the front part of the tops of both ears clipped and a feather-mark at the back of the left—but if there has been a part of the ear cut away on the right at the back, she must belong to John of Gill; she is an excellent animal anyhow, whoever owns her. But where is the overseer?"

"Here I am, Asbiorn; what is the matter now?"

"Do you own this two-year-old, Signor Biarni?"

"I'm sure I don't know. If she has my mark she must belong to me, otherwise not."

"That is just where the difficulty is; the clipped ear-tips and the feather-mark are there, you can see for yourself! But there seems to be a kind of mark on the right ear, most likely a cut, but it was certainly very carelessly done. If it is indeed a cut, then she must belong to John of Gill, for he had the same mark as you when he moved here, as you will remember, and added the other cut afterwards."

"I'm sure I don't know what to say about it, Asbiorn; it will be best to call several men and let them decide the matter; see if you can't find Gudmund, my shepherd, and John of Gill himself. I do n't want to take what does n't belong to me."

Search was therefore made for Gudmund and John, and Gudmund coming up first, Asbiorn said to him:

"Do you know this two-year-old ewe, Gvend?¹ Does she belong to the overseer?"

Gudmund looked the animal over very carefully, but was at length obliged to confess that he could not decide with any degree of certainty.

"This is a nice kind of a shepherd," said Asbiorn, "not to know his own master's sheep. I feel almost positive though that it is his, for it somehow seems to me that I have seen the sheep before, when I have been at the sheep-shed at Tung in the winter; still I do n't believe I could swear to it; no, I would n't like to swear to it, and besides there is that scar in the ear."

At this moment John of Gill arrived, and after having examined the mark, exclaimed:

"I do n't see any reason for perplexity here; the ewe has my mark; she belongs to me."

"Your mark is n't by any means plain, but the question is, whether you know her, and are willing to swear to it."

"That's beside the matter," said John, "since she has my mark. I do n't own so many sheep that I mean to let any dog that comes along rob me of those that do belong to me."

"I feel almost willing to wager though that you have n't a shadow of a claim to this one."

¹ Diminutive of Gudmund.

While the two men were thus wrangling about the ewe, little Sigrid of Tung came toward them, crying as she approached :

"Oh, there is my dear old Kolla¹ come back again from the mountains !"

"Where do you see her ?" said Bjarni.

"Here ! This is my Kolla ; I know her."

"Is this your Kolla ?" cried Asbiorn.

"Yes, Asbiorn dear ! she is a lamb of my mother's short-horned ewe, the one which leads the flock ; but what has become of the green ribbon that was fastened in her ear ?"

"Aha, do you hear that, John !" said Asbiorn. "The ewe is little Sigrid's Kolla ; do you think the child would tell a story ? The ribbon has been torn from the ear in some way, and that's what caused the scar. I felt sure I knew the sheep, though I could n't place it exactly, but I see plainly enough now that it is one of that short-horn breed."

"That is just like you, Asbiorn," said John ; "you always make it suit to side with the person from whom you think you can get an occasional bite, or a drop to drink, but you sha' n't cheat me this time, for, by Heaven ! I own the sheep, as any one can see by the ears."

"That's a lie !" cried Asbiorn, flying into a passion at John's accusation of partiality.

"Oh, I lie, do I ?" bellowed John, accompanying the exclamation with a blow on Asbiorn's nose which brought the blood. Asbiorn loosed his hold on the sheep with the intention of returning the blow, but overseer Biarni leapt forward, and caught and held

¹ A common name for a humble ewe.

him, while two other bystanders seized John to prevent his striking Asbiorn a second time. Asbiorn, heartily displeased at being thus foiled of revenge, with tears in his eyes besought the overseer's permission to beat the rascal just a little, "For I am not wont to get a blow on the nose for nothing, and he had no business to strike me for calling him a liar, for he is one, and besides the expression was n't a strong one."

Biarni pretended not to hear him, and sought in every possible way to restore the peace between them, to such good purpose that they kissed at last, and begged each other's pardon. The two-year-old sheep, however, he caused to be driven to John of Gill's flock, saying that it had caused trouble enough already, and should never again be an apple of discord. When little Sigga saw Kolla led away, and heard that she was to belong thenceforth to John of Gill, she could not help crying, for she was very fond of the ewe, and had long anticipated the pleasure she would have in seeing her again when she should be brought back from the mountains; she ran out behind the wall of the fold and burst into tears. Little Indrid of Holl, who was standing not far away, when he saw Sigrid begin to weep, said to himself, "Oh, I cannot bear to see little Sigga cry!" and went up to her. "What is the matter, Sigga dear? I think so much of you that it makes the tears come into my own eyes when I see you cry," said he, patting Sigrid upon the shoulder with his hand; "tell me what has happened to you?"

"Oh, I am so very sorry to lose my Kolla; she was so pretty; and now my father has let that horrid John of Gill take her from me. She was the only sheep I

had for my own, and it is so nice to own a sheep yourself."

"Do n't cry about that, Sigga dear!" said Indrid. "I have two lambs here in the fold, and you can have whichever one of them you want; my mother has said that I might give you one. Come, let's go and look at them."

Sigrid was overjoyed at this, and Indrid set out with her to find the lambs. They were a pair of very fine ewe-lambs, and Indrid bade Sigrid take her choice. Sigrid hastened to tell her father of the gift, and the overseer praised Indrid's thoughtful generosity, and told Sigrid to thank Indrid for it with a kiss; "And, Indrid, you must come over to Tung some time in the winter to see little Sigga; perhaps you young people may be able to agree better than your parents. I certainly shall not stand in your way."

Nothing further worthy of narration occurred on this occasion; but the following winter, the weather being very cold, Fair-river had frozen over, and Indrid recalled, one Sunday, what Biarni had said to him. He therefore asked his parents for permission to go over to Tung to visit Sigga, which they readily granted, only stipulating that he should return before bedtime. Indrid crossed to Tung, where he was warmly received by Biarni and Sigrid, but much less cordially by Ingveld. Orm, who had obtained his teacher's consent to spend Sunday with his parents, was at home when Indrid came, and he and Indrid soon became as good friends as if there had never been an encounter between them. The children played together the livelong day, building snow-men and coasting. In the twilight they amused themselves capping verses; the two boys opposed Sigrid,

but found they had more than their match, for Sigrid knew all of the Ulvar rhymes¹ by heart from beginning to end, together with a number of other ditties.

When they had finished their supper and the candles were lighted, Sigrid suggested that they should play at cards. The suggestion was favourably received by Indrid and Orm, and Ingveld consenting to take the fourth hand, they began to play Alkort.²

¹ A long epic poem.

² This game is usually played by four persons, but may be played by two. When played by four persons, as it should be, partners are taken as in whist. When played by four persons all of the tens and fives are withdrawn from the pack. The king of diamonds is the highest card, next in value is the two of hearts, then the four of clubs, eight of spades, nine of hearts, called the "fat nine," and the nine of diamonds, called the "thin nine" or "the sickly one." All of the aces have equal value and rank next in order; these are followed by the knaves, and these again by the sixes. The remainder of the cards have no value, and yet it is apparent from the well-known verse—

The two of trumps will take the king,
While for the queen the three's the thing,

that the deuces [except the deuce of hearts, which is next to the highest card in the pack] are higher than the kings except the king of diamonds, and that the threes are higher than the queens. Of the lower cards, the nine of clubs is called "Nail-Jórunn" and the nine of spades "black" or "great brúnkolla" [black poll], while the eights, except the eight of spades, are called "dappers." Of the lower cards the sevens have the greatest value; they are called "bísefar" or "besefar," and may not be taken, but they have no power to take any other card. Nine cards are dealt to each of the four players, the remaining eight cards being left in the pack. If two persons play alone, each of them receives nine cards, eight are left in the pack, and the eighteen cards first above mentioned are used, and beside these all of the "besefar," and four of the cards of no value, as the threes, to fill out the required number. Some persons permit those who have the lead to play the "besefar" before a trick has been taken, others do not allow this until a first trick has been taken. Those who take five tricks win the game, and count one; but if the five tricks be won without their opponents having taken a single trick,

"Indrid and I will be partners," said Sigrid.

"The deal must decide that," said Orm, who was not especially desirous of playing with his mother, as he remembered that she was seldom lucky in getting good cards.

"Here is the king of hearts," said Indrid.

"And here is the queen of hearts, so we shall get to play together, Indrid, just as I wished! Now, do only draw good cards, so that we can win."

it is called "mukur," and they count five points. If they win seven tricks before their opponents have taken a single trick, it is called "sjöblaðastroka" ["seven-blade-stroke"]; if, however, nine tricks be similarly won in succession by the same partners, it is called "níublaðastroka" ["nine-blade-stroke"], and counts nine. If the same partners win six tricks before the others have taken a trick, some persons count it six, while others count it but five, as in "mukur," and eight tricks won in succession are only counted as seven by some players.

In the farmhouses in Iceland, the players of Alkort sit upon the edge of a bed in the living-room, with the sideboard of a bed between them for a table, and this is covered with a pillow to prevent the cards from falling off; while the score is kept with a piece of chalk upon one of the rafters of the roof, or upon the wooden ceiling between. A famous Icelandic, Síra Thomas Sæmundsson, is responsible for the statement that there was no sport in playing "Alkort" without the three articles—the sideboard of a bed, a pillow, and a piece of chalk; without these accompaniments it could not be called genuine "Alkort."

A verse well known to every player of "Alkort," and which expresses the desire for the three highest cards, is commonly recited while the cards are being distributed, and runs as follows:—

I would that fate might bring
Beloved diamond king,
And lay it in my palm.
My wish will be fulfilled
If deuce to me be willed
Succeeded by the four.

It is an old wife's saying, when people do not agree at "Alkort," but begin to quarrel over their cards, that the king of diamonds has doubled himself, and that one of the pair is the devil himself, or one of his retainers, come into the game, to foment disputes between the players.

D

The game began, and the luck was with Indrid and Sigrid, for they won one point after another.

"Now let us see if we can't beat once, Orm!" said Ingveld, as she held out the cards to Indrid to draw; "but the worst of it is that Sigrid has the lead."

"No indeed, I hardly think we shall be beaten this time," said Sigrid gleefully, as she took up her cards. "I have drawn four sevens at once."

"Four sevens at once! then we must have another deal."¹

"Oh no, mother mine! There were only three this time; I had the other from the last deal. I have only had nine altogether."

"There were certainly four at once; it is a misdeal."

The children were obliged to yield to Ingveld's decision, and she dealt again.

"Well, I am no worse off," said Sigrid in an undertone, at the same time endeavouring to tread on Indrid's foot, so that he might understand that she had the deuce of hearts, but instead of this she unwittingly touched her mother's foot under the table.

"This play will not count either," said Ingveld, when she looked at her cards, and saw that the nine of clubs was her highest card; "you were trying to signal to Indrid, and trod on my foot instead, you hussy! I believe you steal from the pack too, and that's the reason I can't draw a good card."

"Indeed, I would n't do such a thing, mother dear!"

"Do you mean to try to deny what I can see for myself? I will not play with you. I think you would

¹ As according to the rules of the game but three cards could be drawn at one time.

better go to playing 'thief'¹ and let yourself be flogged!"

At this they all cried, "Yes, 'thief!'" Let us play 'thief!'" But Ingveld now refused to play any more, and so there was an end of their game; moreover, it was drawing toward bedtime, and Indrid thought it best that he should be returning homeward. Overseer Biarni sent one of his labourers to accompany Indrid across to Holl, having invited him to come over again as often as he could find an opportunity, "For I feel that you are to be a successful man, and I shall enjoy your visits here." Little Sigrid was permitted by her father to walk with Indrid to the end of the home meadow, and when they had come to the edge of the meadow, Sigrid said: "I must turn back here, Indrid dear! I cannot go any farther with you this time. My father told me to give you

¹ This game is played with six cards, namely: the king of spades, "the thief;" the king of diamonds, "the sheriff;" the king of hearts, "the farmer" [the complainant]; the knave of clubs, "the executioner;" the ace of spades, and the ace of hearts, "witnesses." The cards are distributed, and the game begins by the farmer enquiring: "Is the sheriff here in the court?" The sheriff responds: "He is here." Farmer: "I have a complaint to lodge with you." Sheriff: "What is it?" Farmer: "Some one has been stealing from me;" and he proceeds to say what it is that has been stolen, *e.g.* cows from the byre, a riding horse from the stable, so many sheep, or perhaps, food, butter, tallow, etc. Then the sheriff and farmer take counsel together what punishment the thief deserves, and the sheriff accordingly decides how many blows with the rod the thief shall receive, *e.g.* thrice twenty-seven blows. The sheriff then enquires of the farmer whom he suspects, and the farmer is required to select some one of the players. If he hits upon the right one, that is the one who has the king of spades, "the thief," the one so accused has to be flogged; but if the farmer fails to select the right person, then the same punishment adjudged to the thief is meted out to him for his wrongful accusation; the executioner carrying the sentence into effect.

these, for he knows your fondness for working with tools; but these insoles are a present from me. I knitted them myself. And now, farewell! Come over again as soon as you can, for I enjoy seeing you so much, and shall never forget you."

Indrid kissed Sigrid for the gifts, with which he was greatly delighted, especially with the saw and plane which Biarni had sent him. Sigrid and he did not meet again that winter, but later in the season he came occasionally to Tung, to the great pleasure of both Sigrid and himself; their partings always giving evidence of their great mutual affection.

IV

So the time approached when Sigrid was to be confirmed. Her father had taught her the Catechism, to write, and the rudiments of arithmetic ; so that at the time of her confirmation the pastor found her further advanced than other children of her age, and praised her for her accomplishments and pleasing manners. In needlework, however, Sigrid had not made as much progress. Her mother had employed her in the work about the house, like the other maid-servants, so that Sigrid had indeed learned all the indoor work in which she had participated, and to card and spin wool, as is the custom in the country, but her mother had never made any effort to instruct her in needlework or cooking, although she was herself well versed in both. Overseer Biarni had repeatedly requested his wife to have Sigrid instructed in the arts of cooking and sewing, but Ingveld invariably replied that she did not anticipate that Sigrid would ever make a match which would render such accomplishments of any great service to her ; and as she could not be induced to change her opinion, Biarni, although not at all satisfied with this view of the matter, was forced to acquiesce in it.

Biarni had a sister named Biörg, living at the

farmstead of V——, on Skagafirth,¹ a well-to-do widow whose only child, a daughter, had died in infancy. Upon one occasion Biörg came to Tung to her brother's for a visit, and remained several days. It was late in the mowing season, and Sigrid went, as usual, with the women-servants to the distant hay-fields. She left the house early in the morning and did not return until late in the evening, so that Biörg had been at Tung two entire days without seeing the child, nor had any effort been made to make them acquainted. The third day the weather was fine, and the labourers were all busied in the fields baling the hay² and loading the ponies, while Sigrid led the ponies from the meadows to the stackyard, where Biarni received and stacked it. Biörg had seated herself on the wall of the stackyard to talk to her brother, and when Sigrid arrived with the first train of ponies she said to him :

"That is a handsome lass you have there, brother! How comes it that you have n't shown her to me?"

"She has never been at home, poor child!"

"I recognised the family likeness in her at once. Come and let me see you, my dear! You are like my blessed Steinun about the lower part of the face, and the forehead is not unlike either, and you have our dear mother's eyes."

"And she is named after her too," said Biarni.

"It is easy to see that she is our mother's namesake and your pet," said Biörg, smiling.

"Alas! she does n't give any evidence of that now," said Biarni. "She never can amount to anything, poor

¹ A firth in the north of Iceland.

² *i.e.* making it into bundles so that it might be loaded on the ponies' backs, and thus carried to the stackyards.

girl, while she remains here. She does n't learn enough to enable her to mend her own clothes, or to make a bowl of porridge. I have often wished to myself that she could be with you, sister."

Biörg remained silent for a moment, then, presently, exclaimed: "Very well then, let the child come with me for a year!"

Biarni was well pleased with this suggestion, and it was decided that Sigrid should accompany her aunt when she returned to the north. Ingveld, however, affected to be greatly displeased at the arrangement, and wept copiously when the time came for the parting, saying that Sigrid had always been her pet child, the very apple of her eye.

Sigrid went to V—— with her aunt, and remained with her for three years. The longer they were together the more Biörg became attached to her. She soon found that Sigrid was endowed with every trait needful to render her a good housewife, and she therefore spared no pains in instructing her in all kinds of needlework, as well as in such other accomplishments as a sterling woman should possess. Sigrid learned rapidly and thoroughly, for she had both the necessary natural gifts and the desire to profit by her aunt's instruction, so that Biörg came at last to love her as if she had been her own child, and began more and more to forget the loss of her own daughter, and to feel that the wound was healing with Sigrid's presence. She made Sigrid heiress to all her property, real and personal, and said that death alone should separate them.

During the three years that she was at Skagafirth, Sigrid did not return to her home; but her father, as had long been his custom, came once a year to

visit his sister. In the intervals between these visits Sigrid wrote to her father from time to time, and also to her mother; the latter letters, however, seldom dealt with any but the most general topics—the weather, the condition of the live stock, and the like, and although they were always affectionate, yet any observant reader could see that they were of a very different character from the simple and fervent letters which she sent her father. It was as if she found it easier to open the secret chambers of her heart to him than to others. One of Sigrid's letters, written a full half year after her departure from Sigrid-tung, has come into our possession, of which the following is a portion :—

“You ask me, father dear, to tell you frankly how I am, and how I like it here in the north. I should indeed be most ungrateful to God if I were to say other than that all goes well with me. My aunt is as loving to me as if I were her only daughter, and I have often thought to myself that it cannot really be true that the mother's love, that tender and solicitous feeling, which I am at a loss to describe, can never quicken save within that breast where the child's life has first awakened. What then must I call that love which my aunt shows toward me? I cannot imagine a mother's love as differing from it in any wise, and I discover this from my own feelings. I love her as a daughter, with all the warmth of affection which I possess. I find the hours very tedious when she is not with me; I long to do everything in my power to give her pleasure, and whatever she wishes done becomes easy for me to accomplish, since I enjoy nothing so much as the gratification of her desires; in a few words, I am the child of the

house, and how could I be that if she were not as a mother to me? From what I have already written, dear father, you will scarcely need to be told that I am very happy here, the more, I should add, that everybody about me, realising my aunt's affection for me, is unfailing in kindness and thoughtfulness.

"As to the scenery here, every one concedes that it is very beautiful. It is very similar to that about Tung. The mountain-slopes over against the farm are as green, the water is as mirror-clear as that of our own Fair-river, still, although I confess I am at a loss for words to describe it, I feel that there is a difference somewhere. There is a something which the eye cannot discern although the spirit feels it. Whence it comes I cannot tell. Is it because my feelings have changed since my early youth? or is it because some invisible and unintelligible power links us to the spot where our eyes first see the light? Although the hue of each new flower here seems brighter than the last, and each new glen and slope vies in beauty with the other, still I could never bring myself to feel the same attachment for these, where, indeed, I have never known a moment's grief, as for those of my own Fairdale, where I have shed so many bitter tears."

Sigrid had passed three happy years at Skagafirth when her aunt was taken sick, not seriously at first, but the illness became graver day by day and was followed by prostration and weakness. Sigrid watched with her aunt night and day, anticipating her every want with the greatest solicitude and affection. She could not help fearing, not without cause, indeed, that the illness would terminate fatally, and she was on this account almost overcome with grief, and prayed to God that He would prolong her aunt's life.

One night Biörg had been suffering greatly, and wandering in her speech throughout the night, so that she had not closed her eyes in sleep until toward morning, when she sank into a gentle slumber. Sigrid sat by the bedside, and the tears coursed down her cheeks, for she felt a premonition that the time for their parting could not be far removed. At length, overpowered by fatigue and grief, she sank down with her head on the pillow by the side of her aunt, and fell into a doze, from which she was aroused by her aunt gently stroking her cheek.

Day had dawned, and the first rays of the morning sun were streaming into the house. Biörg had entirely recovered consciousness, and when she discovered that Sigrid was awake, she said, "You were sleeping, my darling! I did not mean to wake you. Come and kiss me." When Sigrid had complied, she added, "This must be our parting kiss! May God bless you as long as you live! Strive always to be good and God-fearing, and as modest and simple-hearted as you now are; be ever kind and obedient to your parents; and now pray for me, that I may die. Oh, it is so pleasant that God should send His bright sunrays to cheer my dying eyes!" When Biörg had thus spoken, she sank back on the pillow again, and fell into a gentle slumber, from which she was never more to waken in this life.

All who had known Biörg mourned greatly at her death, but Sigrid most of all. She carefully conducted all the preparations for the funeral, and afterward directed the management of the farm during the winter, and when spring opened she leased the land according to the counsel and advice of the best farmers of the neighbourhood.

Sigrid was no longer content to remain in the north after her aunt's death. She wrote to her father, therefore, requesting him to come for her, and returned with him to Tung, where he took charge of the management of her heritage.

While Sigrid was at Skagafirth, Indrid had been growing up with his father at Holl. He was now so remarkably well developed, both mentally and physically, that he was thought to have few equals in the neighbourhood, and for this reason many persons began to couple his name with that of Sigrid of Tung, as she was regarded as the best match in the district. Sigrid was the fairest of women; she was well developed, of medium height, comely in shape, with slender waist, dainty hands and feet, and exceptionally beautiful soft hair, which was so abundant that it reached to her waist. She possessed greater conversational powers than most women; her voice was clear and mellow; and she was withal a clever, self-possessed lass.

Sigrid had been but a year at Tung after her aunt's death, when her father fell ill and died. Sigrid felt this loss most keenly, but bore it with quiet resignation. Her mother, Ingveld, continued to live at Sigridtung after her husband's death, employing a man to look after the farming, for, as she said, it was not her intention to part with the property until her son Orm should marry. He was at this time at the Bessastad¹ school, but spent the summer with his mother. He was disposed to be arrogant and hasty, but nevertheless had a good heart and true, and he and his sister were devotedly attached to each other.

¹ Thus the High School was called before it was removed from the little hamlet of Bessastad, a few miles south-east of Reykjavik, to its present site in the capital.

V

INDRID and Sigrid met from time to time at the period of which we are writing, and it began to be whispered that they were becoming very fond of each other, and in this instance the old saying proved true that rumour seldom spreads a false report. They had now both arrived at that age when a man and woman who are acquainted and meet frequently, and who have discovered an interest in each other, rarely rest content with mere friendship. The friendliness and attachment which they had felt as children had sprung up in their hearts with renewed vigour, and now began to expand into a sincere and ardent affection. Now, although it would seem to require no very great amount of courage to reveal to another that with which we know he is already as well acquainted as we, still those who have had experience in such matters all agree that the first words of love do not always spring readily to the lips of the lover; and even thus it happened in Indrid's case, although they met from time to time. Moreover, it was Indrid's misfortune never to obtain an opportunity to speak with Sigrid alone. People began to remark that Indrid was given to resorting to those entertainments at which there was a likelihood that Sigrid

would be present, and that he also devised trips to Tung, when his principal errand was to see Sigrid. Upon one of these occasions it so happened that Indrid arrived just as other visitors came. Ingveld caused the guests to be shown into the room, and prepared coffee for them,¹ but left her daughter to entertain them, as she was herself compelled to look after certain household matters which required her immediate attention. Ingveld was accustomed to keep an eye on Indrid and Sigrid to guard against their speaking much together, but as there were now others with them in the room she had no concern that Sigrid should talk with Indrid as with the other guests. The visitors did not remain long in the room, however, and when they departed Indrid and Sigrid were left alone together. Sigrid, who had been conversing with the company with the greatest ease, became silent when they had gone, and dropped her eyes to the floor. Indrid also remained quiet for some time, and thus they sat, on opposite sides of a small table which stood in the room, until Sigrid chanced to look up, and met Indrid's eyes, when the colour immediately flew into her face. Such language in a maiden's glance young men are wont to understand, and Indrid must have been dull indeed if he had not guessed at what was passing in Sigrid's thoughts.

"Do you remember, Sigrid," he said, "when we were little, what good friends we were, and how fond we were of each other?"

"Indeed, I shall always remember it, Indrid dear," said Sigrid, somehow unconsciously grasping Indrid's

¹ It is a universal custom to offer coffee to visitors directly after they arrive at an Icelandic house—a graceful custom, rendered none the less acceptable that the coffee is of uniformly good quality.

hand. Just as the last word passed her lips the door opened, and she had not time to withdraw her hand before her mother entered the room. Ingveld, whose suspicions had been aroused as to what was passing between the young people, gave mute evidence of her displeasure, and afforded them no further opportunity to continue their conversation. Indrid soon rode home, and pondering Sigrid's reply and all the accompanying circumstances, arrived at the conclusion that Sigrid would not be averse if he should ask her hand in marriage. He spoke to his parents soon afterward of his intention to propose to Sigrid, and they were greatly pleased with his choice, although they warned him that there was little likelihood that Ingveld would favour the match. It was on this account decided that Ingeborg, Indrid's mother, should broach the subject to Ingveld and her daughter when she should meet them, and until such time the matter was to remain in abeyance.

One day in the autumn there was to be a wedding at the parsonage of Sigridtung parish, upon which occasion Síra Thomas¹ was to give his daughter in marriage to his curate. Sigrid and her mother were invited to the festivities, as were likewise Indrid and his parents. Overseer John was ill, and Indrid therefore waited on his mother to the parsonage. Sigrid and her mother had also decided to go, but on the morning of the wedding not a pony was to be had²

¹ *Vide* note, p. 16.

² The Icelandic ponies, or, as they are called, horses, are somewhat larger than Shetland ponies, and are very stout, sure-footed, intelligent little beasts. Their burdens are always carried on their backs, over bridle-paths which lead across every description of country, from the marsh and quaking-bog, to the steep and rocky mountain-side. When they are not in use they are turned out to

at Tung, and although search was made until high noon, not a steed could be found except a refractory old hack called Nidhugg,¹ which never went out of the home meadow. This horse their attendant was to ride, if others could be found for the mother and daughter; and as they were now both in readiness to set out, and were wearied with waiting, it was decided to send to the next farm below Sigridtung, and see whether they could not obtain horses there. There was no great superabundance of horses at this farm, but two were secured, of which one was a dappled-gray mare. This Sigrid was to ride, but the mare had never before had a side-saddle on her back, and Sigrid had no sooner mounted her than she began to wheel and kick, until Sigrid was at last forced to dismount, and endeavour to lead her forward by the bridle, but every effort was in vain; as soon as Sigrid resumed her seat in the saddle the mare would wheel and run back as far as she had previously been led forward. It was now almost noon, and Sigrid and the gray palfrey had not got beyond the middle of the home meadow, so that she was constrained to dismount and abandon the undertaking; her mother, however, rode on to the wedding, where most of the guests had already assembled and were preparing to set out to the church. Ingveld was shown up at once to the women's apartment, where among others was Ingeborg of Holl, who came forward and greeted Ingveld most affectionately. Most of the women were in

graze beyond the home meadow. On long journeys they are usually hobbled at night to prevent their wandering too far away, but at other times, being unrestrained, they frequently stray to a distance from the farm.

¹ The name of a mythical serpent, mentioned in the Edda, and represented as gnawing at the roots of the tree Yggdrasil.

Icelandic costume. Ingveld also wore the close-fitting Icelandic bodice and full skirt, together with the *skupla*, the old-time head-dress, pinned above her forehead. Ingeborg of Holl, on the other hand, wore a neat and very becoming curved *fald*.¹ The bride was now ready to arrange her head-dress, and turning to Ingeborg she said :

"I want to ask you to adjust my head-dress for me, Ingeborg. I see you are an expert in such matters. I shall be very well contented if you can only succeed in making me look as well about the head to-day as you do yourself. Your *fald* is very pretty and sits extremely well! Indeed the *fald* is so very much prettier than the hideous *skupla*, which seems to me only fit to be worn by old dowagers."

When the clergyman's daughter spoke thus she had not observed that Ingveld was present and wore the *skupla*, but every one in the room, as if by a common impulse, glanced toward her, and there was no necessity for giving her the reason. She blushed deeply, but took no other notice of the remark.

Ingeborg now proceeded to arrange the bride's head-dress, while Ingveld seated herself upon a bed in the room, by the side of a friend of hers named Groa, who lived at a farm called Leiti; her husband's name was Hall, but he was seldom mentioned, for Groa was understood to be both master and wife. They were poor folk, but Groa was acquisitive, and made frequent calls upon her friends. She was also an astute woman, and kept herself so well informed

¹ A peculiar white festal head-dress shaped like the Phrygian cap, and from which long white silk bands float down the back. The *skupla* is a kind of hood shading the face, and rarely worn by any but old women.

about everything, that she knew to a certainty what food was served at every meal in most of the houses of the neighbourhood. She never confided her secrets to more than one person at a time, and kept, withal, such a strict watch upon her tongue, that she never allowed herself to be inveigled into mentioning the name of her informant; but always concluded her confidences with the set formula: "I have been told this by a trustworthy person, but you must never say that you had it from me, my dear!" Moreover, she knew so well how to adapt her words to the person with whom she was talking, that her auditor was soon convinced that Groa had no better friend here on earth than himself, and that she reposed confidence in no one else.

Necessity, which often creates a friendship between those who would otherwise have nothing in common, had made such bosom-friends of Groa and Ingveld, that the one could not exist without the other. Ingveld was so constituted that she was never in perfect health save when she was supplied, from time to time, with news of what was happening at the neighbouring farmsteads; while, on the other hand, Groa could not fail to be attracted to one who upon all occasions displayed so tender a regard for the needs of her nostrils, for otherwise her nose must have become for her altogether too expensive a luxury. Ingveld, however, never failed to reward a choice bit of gossip with a leaf of tobacco, a roll of twist, or a handful of snuff-leaves.

Ingveld and Groa were soon engrossed in conversation, speaking in whispers, for the most part, as there were many ears in the room. Ingveld fumbled under her apron, and presently produced

a roll of twist, which she slipped stealthily into Groa's hand; this seemed to increase the flow of the latter's conversation, for the whisperings became more frequent.

"God bless you for your kindness to me and my poor nose; this is so like you; you never tire of taking care of it!"

"Oh, don't mention it, Groa! If I were only at home you should have a much better supply. I only slipped this in my pocket against a possible need, for I thought it might be that I would meet you here. But how does it happen that you never come to see us any more of late?"

"Oh, don't speak of it, dearest! I can never get away from those plaguy children of mine; the youngest, the little rogue,¹ is so full of mischief that I never dare to take my eyes off him, much less leave him alone in the house. I have often wanted though, I can assure you, to come up your way; for where can a body find such another establishment as that at Tung; indeed there is no lack of inducements. I can hardly say that I have even seen butter the whole summer; ours has all gone to help scrape the rent together; but I can stand all that if I only have my pinch of snuff—and now you have helped me to that, you blessed creature, just as you have always been wont to do!"

"It is much less than I could wish, Groa dear! But I was on the point of asking you whether you ever go over to Holl?"

"Not I, my love! I never think of going there; why should I, pray? That stingy Ingeborg would not

¹ *Krakkaormanganóruskinnsgreyið*, lit. spoilt - child - worm - urchin-prank-playing-plague-of-my-life.

give a drop of milk to a cat, or an old bone to a dog. I have the greatest aversion for the whole tribe, I can't help it; and that devilish, long-legged lout too, God forgive me that I swear, that booby Indrid of theirs!"

"What else could you expect, dear?" said Ingveld.

"You are quite right; I'm sure I do n't know where he could hope to get gentle manners from. Doves have never yet been hatched from ravens' eggs. That's why I say I can't believe it when I hear it reported that you are going to let my little Sigrid get into their clutches, though there are some persons who believe it."

"That will hardly come about, I think, Groa dear, if I have anything to say about it; I have never liked that Holl family, and never expect to."

"Aye, that's more like it; that is exactly what I have said all the time."

As she was speaking Groa glanced at Ingeborg, who was giving the finishing touches to the arrangement of the bride's head-dress, and she then continued:

"God forgive my dear Valgerda, that she should allow that horrid creature to fumble over her; I should think she might have asked you to arrange her head-dress."

"I was not so well versed in such matters, my dear, as the one whom she selected," said Ingveld, taking a pinch of snuff.

"Oh, my love, how can you talk so?"

"She must have thought so, though; did n't you hear the slight she gave me just now?"

"Yes, more's the pity, that I should hear the like;

but that was n't the reason ; the girl is a little wild, even if she is a clergyman's daughter. Do n't you know why she would n't let you help her dress ? ”

“ No, indeed. ”

“ Well, I suspect that she was afraid you would discover what no one is supposed to see, but which no person with any sense can help seeing for all that ; you must have heard the report though ? ”

“ No, indeed, I have n't heard it. ”

“ Then I can tell it to you ; it concerns herself and the curate here. ”

“ Aha ! ”

“ That's the reason the marriage was n't deferred until spring, as it was at first supposed it would be. ”

“ Ah, yes, yes, I begin to understand now ! ”

Just at this moment some one entered the room, and announced that the clergyman had already gone to the church, and was awaiting the bridal couple. This information caused a great commotion in the room, each of the women striving to be the first down the stairs. The conversation between Groa and Ingveld was thus brought to a hasty termination, but Groa found an opportunity to whisper to her friend as she was leaving the room : “ I will tell you all the particulars some other time, just as I have them from a trustworthy maid here in the house, but I do not want you to quote it as coming from me, my dear ! ”

The guests assembled in the church, the marriage ceremony took place, and then all adjourned to dinner. The seats at table were so arranged that Ingeborg of Holl was placed by the side of Sira Thomas, with Ingveld of Tung next beyond her.

Several of the guests thought they noticed Ingveld blush as she was shown to her seat, and surmised that she thought herself equally entitled to the seat which had been allotted to Ingeborg, in which they were, indeed, not far from the truth.

Ingveld was very taciturn throughout the day, and although the dinner was excellent, the table being loaded with joints and other good cheer, she scarcely touched a bite of anything. "Small is that which the cat's tongue cannot find," runs the proverb, and so it is with the envious. Sira Thomas was overflowing with good spirits, conversing with many of his guests, and especially exerting himself to entertain the women-folk; but, whether by design or accident, it so happened that he always called Ingeborg of Holl "madam," when he addressed her, while, on the other hand, whenever he spoke to Ingveld he called her familiarly "Ingveld mine!" Ingveld felt that no one had a right to withhold from her that to which she was entitled, and which God had given her, and to hear herself thus addressed by the clergyman was harder to bear than if she had received a box on the ear; while on the other hand, whenever he addressed himself to Ingeborg she became as pale as death.

When the guests had risen from the table, Ingveld began, earlier than usual, to make preparations for taking her leave, which led many to suppose that she was ill. Indrid approached his mother, and said, "I want to remind you of your promise to speak with Ingveld of my suit; you are not likely to have a better opportunity again soon."

"I feel just the other way about it, son," said Ingeborg; "Ingveld has not seemed to me to be in a

good humour to-day, for some reason ; still I will make the attempt if you desire it."

She accordingly sought an opportunity to engage Ingveld in conversation before she rode away, and it so chanced that they met at last out behind the house. Ingeborg approached her, and greeting her pleasantly, said :

"I am anxious to say a few words to you before you set out. I speak in another's behalf, and feel that much depends upon your answer."

"Mine is the honour, and yours the condescension, good madam, if you desire to speak with me ! Pray let me hear your errand," said Ingveld, smiling sarcastically.

Ingeborg, from the nature of this reply, felt more fearful than ever of the result of the interview, and remained silent for a moment ; but as she had already gone so far it was very difficult to turn back, and she therefore continued :

"My errand is that my son Indrid has bade me speak with you and your daughter and ask you whether or not his proposal for your daughter Sigrid's hand will be favourably entertained by you. He says that she of all the young women of the neighbourhood is the one whom he would choose for his wife, both because of her family and her own personal charms."

"'Tis the unexpected that happens," said Ingveld. "The very last thing I should ever have supposed could come to pass would be that you people of Holl would think of allying yourselves with us common folk across the river. I should like to know positively whether you mean this in jest or in earnest."

"On our part we are perfectly sincere," said Ingeborg. "I am sure there are very many who would

find no disparity between my son Indrid and your daughter Sigrid."

"You and others must determine, as you see fit, whether such a match would be appropriate or not; but your errand can soon be disposed of, so far as I am concerned, good madam, for I shall never give my consent to such a marriage. As to Sigrid's wishes I can give you no information, but I am inclined to think that she will probably look in another direction, if she be, indeed, thinking of marrying at present."

After this Ingveld walked rapidly away. She changed her plans in regard to returning home, and was in the best of humours during the remainder of the day.

Ingeborg repeated the interview to Indrid, whereat he was greatly cast down; the more that he concluded, from Ingveld's words, that his conjectures as to Sigrid's feelings were but the result of his own vain imaginings. He and his mother rode home together, Indrid almost beside himself with distress; while Ingveld when she returned from the festivities, toward evening, was in the happiest of moods. She said nothing to Sigrid, however, concerning her conversation with Ingeborg. Shortly thereafter a rumour began to be circulated in the neighbourhood, that Indrid of Holl had proposed to a young woman living in the western part of the parish, and that although she was the daughter of a lowly peasant, she had refused him, and in consequence of this he was half demented. It was impossible to trace this rumour to its original source, but those who investigated the matter most thoroughly came to the conclusion that some trustworthy person had told it to Groa of Leiti. Ingveld questioned every

visitor who came to Tung concerning the report, inquiring into the most minute particulars, and never lost an opportunity to joke about it, especially if Sigrid happened to be present, which Sigrid received with ill-disguised displeasure.

So the winter and the following spring passed, and still Indrid had not recovered from the blow, nor did he visit Sigridtung during the year.

VI

Now several new personages are to make their appearance in the tale. Eight or ten miles from Sigridtung, in the adjoining parish, at a farm called Burfell, dwelt a man named Bard. He was a man possessed of much valuable live-stock, as well as other property, but was not over-rich in friends or well-wishers. He had one son called Brand, who was married and lived at Brandsted; this son, who bore a greater resemblance to his mother's than his father's family, had never been a favourite with Bard. Bard's wife, Gudrun by name, had come from a Thingshire family; she had been dead only a few years at the period with which our tale now deals. It was commonly reported that she had gone to her grave utterly wearied with life. The husband and wife had been very different in disposition; she was generous, while he was niggardly, although for the most part quiet and inoffensive enough. There were many people in the neighbourhood who were wont to find their way to Burfell in the spring, and to those of them who were hungry Gudrun was always disposed to give something to eat, as there was always food to spare. Bard, while he looked with no favour on Gudrun's charity, seldom recalled the alms which she had

given, but to the end that not overmuch should escape from his larder through this leak, he took care that his wife should not have overmuch under her control. He himself weighed out to the servants the butter and other solid food, and kept a careful account of every bit of meat which went into the cook's hands, whenever a mess of pottage was to be prepared. Gudrun had unlimited control of the dairy matters, but after each churning she was required to turn over all the butter to her husband, and as he knew exactly how many cows and ewes he had, and most accurately the quantity of milk which each yielded at a milking, and how much butter could be made from each can of milk, it was well-nigh impossible for Gudrun to abstract the smallest quantity of butter from the churning without Bard's discovering the loss. Gudrun had charge of the keys, but there was one key with which Bard never parted on any account, sleeping or waking, and this was the key to the loft over the store-house. Those who were acquainted with the contents of this room were not surprised that Gudrun was not permitted to have free range there. Aged masses of suet, and round gray skins of butter were hidden away in vast quantities in a mammoth chest that stood athwart the gable end of the room; on one side of the loft was a large corn-bin, on the other a triple row of barrels, filled with different kinds of pickled meats and sheep-bellies, from which issued little rivulets of brine, that trickled across the floor in various directions, disappearing at last under a gigantic pile of fish, which filled the entire front end of the room. Poles were placed along the roof the whole length of the room, and these were hung from end to end with

smoked meat, whole carcasses of wethers and ewes, so that it was impossible to walk erect in the room on account of the dangling legs of the shoulders. Before the meat was stored in the loft it was, according to custom, first placed in the smoke-house below, and while it hung there curing, ever the rosy-fingered goddess of the morn forsaking the couch of the Titans found farmer Bard carefully inspecting his treasures; never "the day-star sank into the deep sea" ere that he had rejoiced himself with the sight of the plump sides of mutton, carefully counting and examining them before he betook himself to his bed. A more minute account of the contents of the loft cannot be given, for to few persons was it vouchsafed to get beyond the head of the stairs, and, indeed, only those persons attained the threshold who had first exhibited to Bard a new specie-dollar, or a venerable crown-piece with which he longed to become more intimately acquainted. There were many precious articles on the first floor of the store-house which did not need to be especially guarded, and which were for the most part not eatable. One treasure there was, however, which we cannot pass by without notice; this was a very tall and corpulent cask filled to the brim with roll-sausages, preserved rams' heads, blood-puddings, and other delectable dainties, swimming in a curdled sea of sour milk. It was not because Bard prized this cask less than the others, in the loft above, that he had given it an inferior position, but because of the narrowness of the trap-door admitting to the store-room, and the weakness of its joints, coupled with a general decrepitude, which might render such a journey fatal at its advanced age and in its enfeebled condition.

It stood, therefore, at the foot of the stairs, half buried in the earth and banked up on all sides with manure. In the wall above the cask were two pegs, upon one of which hung a bundle of old horn-buckles, and upon the other Gudmund Hallason's riding-gear. This Gudmund was Bard's foster-son, and beloved by old Bard above all men; indeed, so much did he resemble him in appearance and disposition, that never was son liker father—a fact which had often given rise to the remark, "Cattle are ever like their master."¹ No one knew, however, of any relationship existing between them, other than that the boy's mother had been a servant of Bard's named Halla. It had happened so unfortunately for Halla, that when she came to father Gudmund she could find no likelier parent, in the parish or out, than a poor wretch of a labourer who had been on a protracted spree several months before the birth of the child; and so Bard, out of pure goodness of heart, took the fatherless one into his own house and raised him after his own heart, a course which was widely approved, for it was evident that he could, with all propriety, have cast the child upon the parish. With each year Bard's affection for the lad increased more and more; he had devised to him forty hundreds² of land, and he always added, in speaking of this, that his beloved

¹ *Fé er dróttni (fóstri) glíkt. Viga Glúms Saga*, chap. xiii.

² Before coins were introduced in Iceland, value was reckoned in *vaðmál* (wadmal), a woollen stuff, a *hundred*, being a hundred and twenty ells of this stuff or its equivalent in value. "All property, real as well as personal, is even at present in Iceland taxed by hundreds; thus an estate is a 'twenty or sixty hundred' estate; a franklin gives his tithable property as amounting to so and so many hundreds" (Vigfusson, Dict. s.v. *hundrað*). A milch-cow, or six ewes with lambs represent the value of a "hundred."

Gudmund should be the one to catch the fleas in his bed when he was dead. Few persons unacquainted with Bard could understand this figure of speech, but those who knew him well construed this obscure statement to have reference to a little chest, which it was generally believed was buried at the head of his bed, and which was reputed to contain sundry shining metal discs.

At the period at which we have now arrived in our tale, Gudmund was a full-grown man. The young women of the neighbourhood did not think him especially well-favoured; but every one knew that he was a very thrifty man, and that, furthermore, as the pet of the wealthy Bard of Burfell, he was likely in time to come into a goodly property. It is therefore extremely probable that the fathers of marriageable young women would have taken these matters into consideration before rejecting him, if only he had seen fit to pay his court to their daughters. But Gudmund was much better acquainted with beef and mutton than with women and courtship, and it was also generally believed that if he should ever form an attachment for some one of the daughters of Eve, he would neither allow himself to be influenced by beauty alone, nor would he pay too dear for mere intellect; he himself, for that matter, had sufficient mother-wit to enable him to farm and hoard—to him the two prime motives for existence. Gudmund had once learned to read, and could still read each of the prayers fluently, especially when he knew something of it beforehand without the book, but he was seldom urged to attempt the sermons of Jónsbók.¹

¹ The sermons of Bishop Jón Vídalín (born 1666, died 1720) are so called; it is "a highly esteemed work; perhaps no Ice-

His foster-father had had him taught to write his name, for, as he said, it might often stand one in good stead to be able to scrawl one's name, as, for instance, if you should want to buy or sell a piece of land. Gudmund was, however, far from being a model penman, for he still continued to write the first letter of his name with a small "g," and he likewise began his surname with a small letter, but the "s" in "son" he never failed to write with a capital. Gudmund had never learned arithmetic, but he was, nevertheless, remarkably quick at reckoning up fish and quarters,¹ in which computation he used toes and fingers, after the Greenland fashion, obtaining the result with remarkable celerity.

One day in the summer after Indrid's proposal to Sigrid, of which mention has already been made, old Bard was rummaging about the loft of the store-house; he had opened the great butter-chest, and, seated on the floor of the room with outstretched legs, was occupied in arranging the skins of butter around him. Discovering that one of the skins was beginning to burst, he took his needle and thread to sew it together, humming the while, as was his wont whenever he had to do with butter or money; he had been seated at his work only a few moments when he heard some one enter the room below. It at once occurred to him that he must have neglected to lock the door of the store-house after him, and he concluded that it might be some one who had come in with the intention of investigating the contents of the large cask landic book is so stocked with popular sayings and phrases of every kind."

¹ Units of value and weight. A fish was, in the old computation, equal in value to half an ell of wadmal; the quarter to ten pounds.

below. He sprang to his feet in great haste, and called down the stairs :

"Who is that down there?"

"It is I, foster-father!"

"Oh, is that you, Gudmund? I could not imagine who it could possibly be. I did n't know that you men had come home from the hay-field, and so I was half scared. One can never feel easy among such a pack of devils, for although everybody here about the farm seems to be honest, nobody can ever convince me that some one has not been tampering with that cask. What do you think about it, Gudmund? How many liver-puddings were there left over last spring?"

"There were eighteen," said Gudmund; "yes, eighteen."

"Yes, that's what I thought; you counted them for me."

"Yes, you had me to count them, and if I remember aright there were eighteen—yes, Heaven knows, as I live, there were eighteen!"

"And to-day there are only sixteen. Look for yourself, two are gone, and they did not leap out of the cask of themselves; that's why I say it's necessary to keep a sharp look-out here if we do n't want to have the house stolen from over our heads; but they can pilfer as much as they like from me now, I could n't see it if they were to steal the very eyes out of my head; I am no longer able to watch them; but come up here a minute, won't you, Gudmund, now that you are down there? I want to have a look at one of the front meat-casks; I am afraid all the pickle has run off, and I can't lift the big stone from it."

"Yes, father, I will come," said Gudmund, and he went up, and lifted the stone from out of the cask. "I

do n't wonder that you could n't manage a mountain like that."

"No, for I am getting so weak and miserable of late, that I can't lift anything on account of my hips—no, I believe it has not leaked any to hurt, the blessed old cask—and that's why I say that I am no longer fit to manage the farm affairs, Gudmund dear! I wish that you could take charge of everything, so that I could settle down quietly and take comfort here in the shed. I would have the old hovel all to myself, keep a few sheep on fodder with you, and live on the rental from my few small farms. I would like to have you take charge of the farm; but I want you to distinctly understand beforehand, that I do n't mean to give any compensation. You will have to take the house here just as it is; everything is in fair condition, except that the entry-way is beginning to sink in a little, but otherwise the house will hang together for a good many years yet.¹ What do you say to it,

¹ The Icelandic farmhouse is, in fact, a series of small houses, a story or a story and a half in height, thatched with turf and with thick turf walls. The gable ends of these enclosures form the front of the building; they are faced with boards, and are usually of uneven number—three, five, or seven. In the centre gable is the low door which admits to the unfloored entry, where on either side and overhead are stored pack-chests, saddles, bridles, ropes, whips, and other travelling-gear. In the right-hand wall of the entry is a door leading into the *stofa* or guest-chamber; this is usually lined with deal, with a board floor, and stationary bed in an alcove at the back of the room—that is to say, at the opposite side of the room from the windows, which, placed in the board wall of the gable end, look out upon the pavement in front of the house and the home-meadow beyond. The furniture of the guest-room consists of a chest of drawers (in which the table-linen, knives, forks, etc., are kept), a chair or two, one or two small rudely-painted chests, which can be packed one on each side of a pony's back. Two or three cheap prints hang upon the walls, and a decanter of "schnapps" usually stands upon the window-ledge. On the opposite side of the

would n't you like to have a try at farming in a small way?"

"I do n't know what to say about it, foster-father!"

"Well, I should think the time had arrived when you ought to be picking out some jade for yourself."

"Yes, I should never attempt to keep house with this Gudda¹ here!"

"I can't blame you for that, Gudmund! I have given her a pretty thorough trial, and I should never think of advising you to select her for a housekeeper. You will have to be seeking a wife for yourself, that's clear!"

"Yes—," said Gudmund, dwelling for a long time upon his "yes"; "these women! and these wives!"

"Well, I have come to the conclusion, Gudmund, since my wife died, that wives are better, on the whole,

entry is, perhaps, another *stofa*, or in a small farmhouse a store-room. If there be more than three gables at the front of the house, the rooms which they represent are generally occupied as a smithy, tool-shed, and store-rooms. The entry at the middle of the house leads to the family apartments, which are usually at the rear of the building, the kitchen, eating-room, buttery, dairy, and living-room, or, as it is called, the *badstofa* (lit. bath-room; why it is so called is uncertain, probably because the bath-room of the ancient Icelandic house was similarly situated); this is the sitting-room by day, the sleeping-room by night for the entire family, in which the beds are arranged like the berths of an American sleeping-car, a single row on each side of the long room. These farmhouses are, from the nature of their construction, damp, and in a less salutary climate than that of Iceland would probably have a serious effect upon the health of their inmates; as it is, the dampness soon destroys the timber used in the building, and the houses are, therefore, shortlived, rarely lasting more than two decades. They are not constructed entirely of timber, because of the scarcity of that commodity, or of stone because of the lack of lime. There are no trees in the country, and all of the timber used in the island is brought thither by sea.

¹ Like Gunna, a diminutive for Gudrun.

than these miserable housekeepers, and I must admit that although my blessed Gudrun was extravagant in many respects, she did not filch everything out of my hands as this rascally Gudda does. But I was going to ask you whether you have n't got your eye set on some one hereabouts, whom you would like to marry?"

"No, indeed, not a soul! Besides there is n't one of them here in this neighbourhood who has any property whatever. What the deuce should I do with a woman who does n't even own the clothes on her back?"

"You are quite right about that; it would indeed be a last resort to make such a selection; but I know one, who does n't live a great way off, who would n't come empty-handed."

"Who is that, pray?"

"Sigrid Biarni's daughter of Tung."

"Ah, do you think so? Have they much property at Tung, do you think? There are not many children, I believe."

"I was not thinking of that. I do n't imagine that the Tung property will be a particularly fat boar to flay; Biarni did not own the land. But the point is, that she inherited three or four farms from her aunt."

"Ah, that's a different affair altogether," said Gudmund, rubbing his hands.

"That is why it occurred to me that it would n't be such a bad match for you; it will make a very good nest-egg if it is well managed, along with the little property you own yourself, even if it is n't very extensive now. You have also that bit of land which I have promised you, and some shillings besides, I suppose."

"I! shillings! Indeed I have n't any money; I haven't a penny to my name."

"You will never get me to believe that, although you never can be brought to an admission. What's the reason, Gvend, you will never let me see your money?"

"Why, because I have n't any. But why is it you will never show me yours, foster-father?"

"That is a different thing altogether; I have never had any money—you would certainly get to see it if there were any—a cow's-worth or so, that is all."

"Well, it is far easier for you to take in the shillings than for me."

"They all have to go out again, though. I had to give almost three specie-dollars to the sheriff, and a rix-dollar to the clergyman, for that kind of cattle will never take anything but money, wool, or butter, and it seemed to me about as broad as long which I gave them. But if I should leave any shillings behind me when I die, you may be sure that you will get them, for few as they may be, I can't bear to think of their flying into the fire through that son Brand of mine. But what do you think of what we have just been talking about; don't you think you ought to make an effort to get hold of the property which this Sigrid owns?"

"Do you think it can be accomplished?"

"Why, we can at least find out what the mother and daughter have to say to it. I will try to hobble over there with you, if you like."

With this the conversation between Bard and Gudmund ended, but the next day saw the horses driven home to Burfell. Their steeds were certainly far from attractive in appearance, with galled backs and shrunken sides; but keeping horses in the stable was an extravagance in which they did not indulge themselves at Burfell, where sumpter-horses were in greater demand

than saddle-nags. Bard and his foster-son were scarcely more elegant than their horses, though they had arrayed themselves in their best for the occasion. Gudmund wore a blue jacket which had been bought originally from a German, and was by no means a good fit for Gudmund, who was a tall man, while the coat had been designed for a man of medium stature; this led to its puckering up about the shoulders and back, while the lappets sagged down in front. Gudmund was exceptionally long of leg, and as his trousers were too short to meet the waistcoat above, a line of yellow shirt was visible between, which served to complete Gudmund's resemblance to some huge scarabee. The waistcoat was of good lustrous stuff, but unhappily, upon the occasion of a visit to the trading-station, Gudmund, in lifting the pack to the back of one of the ponies, had scraped some of the buttons off, on one side, and as he could not match these again, he had filled their places with others of an entirely different variety; the contrast thus discovered was so marked that even the most careless person in matters of dress would scarcely have looked with favour upon so striking an arrangement in buttons. He wore a pair of waterproof boots, which he had taken for a debt from a Danish seaman, and of which he had never been able to dispose; but they now stood him in good stead, for when should the like articles of apparel be worn, if not upon such an occasion as this? Moreover, Gudmund, who had always looked upon one foot as exactly like the other, had drawn that boot upon his right foot which those persons more familiar with the use of such gear would have placed upon the left.

Unaccustomed to such elaborate decoration, it was mid-day before the foster-pair were ready to set out. Then at high noon, out upon the pavement in front of the house, the suitor was come, whip and hat in hand ; this hat was very imposing, and bore within the crown the words, "Einar Hakonson, waterproof."¹

Just as the foster-pair were mounting their horses, Sorrel, the milkmaid, came out to the front of the house, and, shading her eyes with one hand, stared at Gudmund for some time, and then turning to Gunna, the shepherdess, who was also watching the couple, she whispered :

"Good gracious, is n't our Gudmund rigged out though? Where does he mean to go, do you know?"

"How should I know anything about it? It looks though as if he were going a-courting."

"The deuce you say!" said Sorrel, emptying the contents of the pail which she held in her hand. "I'm thinking that all the poor devils will be turning out now, if our Gvend is going sparking."

Late in the afternoon the foster-pair arrived at Sigridtung, and knocked at the door, when it befell, exactly as in the song: "Forth came a rustic boor" and stared him round. When they had each greeted him with a kiss, he asked them the news, to which they made reply, that they knew little of any; "But is the master at home?" said Gudmund.

"Yes, with God, for he is dead," said the man, "but I have charge of affairs here now, and with regard to anything outside of the house it is just as if you were speaking with Ingveld herself when you

¹ The mark of an old and, at the time, unique hatter in Reykjavík, formerly well known in the country.

talk with me ; as for the rest, my name is Arni, and I lived for a long time with Síra Torfi—I do n't know whether you knew that or not ; but is n't your name Bard of Burfell ? ”

“ Yes, my name is Bard. ”

“ Well, I half-way thought I knew you, though it has been a long time now since I saw you. I got some butter of you last year which did n't weigh out when I got home. ”

“ I do not understand why there should have been any shortage ; but tell me, is the madam at home ? I wish to speak with her. ”

Thereupon Arni went in, and shortly afterward Ingveld made her appearance, and showed the visitors into the guest-room. This apartment occupied one of the small structures of which the farm-house was composed, and was entered at the left of the house door ; it was three fathoms long, and a very attractive room for a country house. In the gable end, looking out on the court, were two windows, and between these a small green table with a chair on each side. At the opposite end of the room, by the door, was the guest-bed, over which was spread a brocaded coverlet. On the other side against the bed stood a red chest with Ingveld's cipher painted on the front—this was her clothes chest ; at the end of this stood a somewhat smaller but newer chest, which belonged to Sigrid. Ingveld led Bard to a seat by the table, and began to ask him the news. Meanwhile Gudmund seated himself upon Sigrid's chest, with his hat upon his knees, holding it by the brim with both hands, and there he remained, but never a word fell from his lips.

It was not long before a young girl entered the room. She had fair hair, partially covered by the

coquettish Icelandic hood with its long black tassel reaching to her shoulder; she wore a dark blue skirt, close-fitting embroidered bodice, and striped wadmal apron.¹ This was Sigrid Biarni's daughter. Modest in mien, but without bashfulness, she crossed the room and handed her mother the coffee-pot which she bore in her hands, while the guests rose to meet her, and greeted her with kisses. Ingveld took the pot, rubbed the bottom with the corner of her apron, blew in the spout, and then placing it upon the table began to serve the coffee. She first helped Bard, and then motioned Sigrid to come and take a cup to Gudmund, who still sat upon the chest. Sigrid approached Gudmund with the coffee-cup in one hand and the sugar-bowl in the other. Gudmund reached with one hand for one of the largest pieces of sugar in the bowl, while with the other he took the cup, leaving the saucer in Sigrid's hands, for his experience in such matters was so limited that he did not know that he was expected to take the saucer with the cup, and Sigrid, smiling, placed it again upon the table. Gudmund held the lump of sugar in his hand and nibbled from it, as he gulped his coffee, putting the remainder in his vest pocket when he had finished. As Gudmund was finishing his coffee, Ingveld turned to Bard and said, "Are you travelling far to-day, Bard?"

"No, we are going no farther, good madam! My Gudmund and I have ridden over on a pleasure trip, for I was desirous of having a little conversation with you."

"I hope that you intend to remain with us over night, Bard; it is n't so very often that you come to see us."

¹ This is the ordinary garb of Icelandic women.

"You are quite right, madam ! It is n't often that I ride out for my own pleasure ; still I think I must return this evening after my errand is accomplished, and about this I should prefer to speak with you in private, if you can so arrange it."

"I shall have to ask you then to come with me into the living-room. Sigrid, I hope you will not allow friend Gudmund to become weary here in the meantime."

Bard and Ingveld left the room, while Sigrid remained behind, and waited patiently for Gudmund to begin the conversation with some subject of interest ; but Gudmund could think of nothing whatever to say, and sat in silence upon the chest, kicking his heels against the side, and glancing furtively at Sigrid from time to time. Sigrid found little satisfaction in sitting thus, dumbly, looking at Gudmund, and it was evident that the only escape was for her to address him first. She knew that a very entertaining conversation may often spring from a commonplace beginning if the person addressed only be endowed with conversational powers, and she therefore began with the trite remark :

"Is there anything new of interest in your neighbourhood ?"

"Thank you very much," said Gudmund ; "no, I have n't heard of anything new except that there was a quarter of mutton stolen recently at Hammer. I don't know whether you have heard of that, or not."

"Yes, I think we heard something about it the other day. Have they any idea who the thief was ?"

"Oh no !" said Gudmund, relapsing into silence

again. Sigrid saw that here was an end of this conversation, and the subject did not seem to her of sufficient interest to warrant any effort toward reviving it ; so she remained silent a few moments, and then said :

"You have had a new clergyman in your parish since last spring ; how are you pleased with him ?"

"Oh, I believe he is a careless, inoffensive sort of fellow ; he does n't drink though, as the last one did—that much may truly be said of him ; the other fellow drank himself out of house and wits."

"Well, that is certainly in his favour. He will, no doubt, prove to be a better manager than his predecessor is said to have been."

"Yes, I dare say he will ; he is n't such a poverty-stricken man as the other one was ; still it is n't such a wonder that he should have enough to eat, with all the tithes in butter he gets—great Heavens, what a good thing might be made out of it ! It does seem though as if the devil was after these clergymen ; it does n't seem to make any difference at all how much they get,—take it all together, I do n't believe he lays up anything, worth considering, from all the good gifts that are showered upon him. I'd guarantee that I would make a neat thing out of it if I had such an income as he has every year."

"Yes, but you can't expect everybody to be as thrifty and saving as you of Burfell."

"Oh, I do n't think you can call me saving. I eat all the time, and a good deal too ; but my foster-father, it is true, is a very economical man, for upon my word, he can go for weeks together without tasting butter or fat, and not because he has n't it either."

"I dare say for that," said Sigrid, half smiling. "I

suppose it is because he wants to turn it into money. But I was about to ask you how you like your new clergyman's sermons?"

"I really don't know. I hear some praise him, but I am ashamed to say that I have been to church but once since he came, and then I only heard the last part of the sermon; you see, I was talking with a man, out at the side of the church, who was owing me something."

"How did you like what you heard?"

"Oh, I think it was very good; I thought it seemed like Strumssouls waking."¹

Here an end was put to their conversation by the return of Ingveld and Bard to the room. However, although their talk had been but brief, Sigrid had gained no small insight into Gudmund's character and attainments.

Bard, soon afterward, prepared to set out for home, and as he was taking leave of her, Ingveld said to him: "Very well, Bard, we will let the matter rest for the present, but if everything goes as I wish, I will let you both know immediately."

¹ Gudmund probably meant Storm's *Soul's-waking*, a well-known devotional book.

VII

THE result of the conversation between Bard and Ingveld was, that she had agreed to give Gudmund her daughter Sigrid, unless the latter should positively refuse to consider his offer. Foster-father and son rode home, and several days passed without Ingveld's mentioning the matter to Sigrid, but she was unusually affectionate in her manner toward her daughter, and called her "my love" whenever she addressed her, which was very gratifying to Sigrid. Ingveld seemed to be in doubt for a time whether she should endeavour to persuade her daughter to marry Gudmund, or whether she should break the promise which she had given Bard, and was, therefore, at a loss how she might best approach Sigrid upon the subject. One morning she plucked up courage, however, and turning to Sigrid said, in unusually sprightly fashion :

"I cannot deny, my love, that the relations between us, heretofore, have not been altogether as cordial as they should have been. It may be that I have been as much to blame as you, still you are somewhat responsible. But you must know that I do not really love you less tenderly than my other children ; you were all nourished at the same breast,

and I am, indeed, equally attached to you all ; still it does not seem to me unnatural that I should be inclined to be more demonstrative toward the child who displayed the most affection and seemed best disposed to be guided by my wishes. I have now, for the first time, laid the innermost feelings of my heart before you, and I trust that henceforth there will be a better understanding between us ; and that you will ever be guided by my wishes, for that is your first duty."

Sigrid believed that her mother spoke from the heart, and with tears of joy in her eyes she threw her arms about her neck, and exclaimed :

"Yes, darling mother, I will strive to do your will in everything. I am very, very sorry to think that I have ever displeased you in anything, and I beg you to forgive me !"

"Yes, my dear !" said Ingveld, and kissed Sigrid. "You shall see what a good mother I can be to you. But I foresee that I am not to be permitted to keep my children about me much longer. It is always so with us poor parents ; we have no sooner got you well upon your feet, and are come to the time when we can have most comfort and enjoyment with you, than you fly away from us out into the world, and I dare say you will be no exception. You will be getting married, I suppose, whenever you have a good offer, and, of course, then it would be a sin for me to be so selfish as to stand in the way of that which God has planned for you," and at this Ingveld began to snuffle.

"You need not worry much about that, mother," said Sigrid. "I fancy I shall hardly be getting married in a trice."

"And why should n't you, my love ? It is your

destiny, and my sainted husband, who appeared to me in a dream last night, showed me that this event was not far distant. Moreover the person who solicits your hand will be very hard to refuse; whom do you think it is?"

"It is something I have n't thought much about yet, mother dear!" said Sigrid, blushing.

"Mark what I say, Gudmund of Burfell is to be your husband, if it be God's will, and no other man!"

"Oh, I can't believe that, mother mine! I sincerely hope he will not ask me."

"That was, nevertheless, his and Bard's errand here the other day."

"And what did you say to them, mother?"

"I gave my consent to it, so far as I was concerned, and promised to speak with you about it, for it never occurred to me but that you would thank God to get so promising and wealthy a husband."

Sigrid was greatly distressed at this information, and she and her mother entered into a long discussion of the matter. She soon discovered that, however moderately she expressed her opinions, she was always at variance with her mother. When she objected, that Gudmund was very ill-looking, her mother replied that beauty does not buy bread, that Sigrid's father had been anything but handsome, and still had been looked up to as the leading man of his parish; on the other hand she enumerated Gudmund's merits: that he was a good husbandman, even-tempered, and very well-to-do, and that, moreover, his foster-father would without doubt see to it that he should come into the greater part of the property at Burfell. Sigrid again objected, that Gudmund was so very ignorant; but Ingveld replied to this objection

that mere book-knowledge does not go far toward furnishing food when you set out to keep house for yourself. With this the mother and daughter separated, on this occasion, but Ingveld devised some excuse almost every day for speaking in Gudmund's behalf, nor did she cease to treat her daughter, always, with the greatest consideration.

Sigrid felt that she could on no account be induced to marry Gudmund, and she realised now, more than ever, that she could not banish Indrid from her thoughts. At times she felt convinced that he was interested in her; he had so often given evidence of this in his manner toward her, though he had said but little; and especially had this impression been confirmed by the few words which he had uttered upon the occasion when they were left alone together in the room. Again, at times, the thought would force itself upon her that possibly this feeling was a mere idle fancy, formed only from her fervent desire that it might be a reality. If her hope was in truth well-grounded, and Indrid did really care for her, she was still at a great loss to understand how it had come to pass that he should have proposed to some other lass, as had been commonly reported. Again it seemed strange to her that Indrid had neither visited her, nor made any effort to see her during the winter, and that he no longer met her at the companies which she attended, as had formerly been his wont. To these feelings was added the certain knowledge that her mother would be sorely displeased if she should not follow her advice and marry Gudmund.

By reason of these conflicting emotions she became very unhappy, and wept frequently when alone, taking heed, however, to conceal her sorrow,

for there was no one to whom she could speak, or to whom she dared to confide her trouble. One night, as so often happened, she lay for a long time without being able to sleep for thinking of her position and weeping bitterly. Some time after midnight, however, she fell asleep, and dreamed that she was standing on the pavement before the house, her mother was by her side, and held in her hand an old hood of some kind, which seemed to her most like an old herdsman's-hood.¹ Her mother was in the act of placing it upon her head, when, at the same instant, it seemed to her that her aunt Biörg approached them, and exclaimed: "I do n't know what you can be thinking of, Ingveld dear, to place that hideous thing on the child's head!" and with this she struck the hood, so that it flew into a cask of curds which stood hard by. She then produced a handsome *fald*,² and Sigrid fancied, in her sleep, that her aunt was about to place it upon her head, but at this instant she awoke.³ Sigrid was greatly pleased with this dream, and she interpreted it in accordance with her wishes, Gudmund being typified by the old herdsman's-hood, while Indrid was the *fald*, and the one thing wanting in the dream was that her aunt had not succeeded in placing the *fald* upon her head. She pondered it for some time, and not being able to sleep again she

¹ The Icelandic word is *lambhúshetta*, lit. lamb-shed's-hood; it is a hood to wear in cold weather. The name probably originally applied to the shepherd's head-gear at the yearning season.

² Cf. note p. 48.

³ It is a common superstition in Iceland that if a young girl dream of head-gear, she is shortly to be married. A very similar dream to this is related in the old Icelandic literature in the *Laxdæla Saga*, chap. xxxiii.

decided to rise, and having dressed she went out into a little ante-room adjoining her bed-chamber. It was then so light that she could readily see to write. She took her pen and ink, and wrote a letter, which she had finished, folded, and addressed before any one else in the house had risen. The letter was to Ingeborg, Indrid's mother, and ran as follows :

"MY HONOURED FRIEND—I know full well that women are not wont to take the initiative in speaking with men about matters relating to love and courtship, and in this we act, no doubt, in accordance with our nature, since God has so endowed us that words are not necessary for us to enable us, with modesty and propriety, to reveal to them our innermost feelings. But whether this usage is right in itself or not, I feel that, in my present condition, my heart will grant me no rest until I confide to some one, that which fills my breast and which constantly torments me. Were I but near the man who is never out of my thoughts, I should not mind whether people would think it according to custom or not, but obeying the innocent promptings of my heart, I would reveal to him the secret which lies hidden there, if he should not discover it for himself. But something, most likely my unlucky star, denies me this at present, and has all too long prevented me from meeting him ; to whom then shall I disclose that which I can no longer conceal ? I have decided to come to you with my secret, since you are a woman like myself, and your woman's soul will at least be able to understand and appreciate that trouble which may be contained in the heart of a woman oppressed with sorrow, and who is in grievous doubt whether or not her fondest hopes

are empty fancies and mists of error. May your heart be so sympathetic that you will be able to feel compassion for me, if you find that my thought is only a dream which may never be realised, a desire without hope, and at least not cast that which I have given into your keeping out into the world to be jeered at. That which I wish to confide to you is that I am anxious to know whether there may be any ground for the hope, which I have long nourished, that your son I—— has an especial place for me in his thoughts. If such should be the fact you will be doing your son an acceptable service, and me a real kindness, if you will inform yourself with regard to it, and let me know quietly at the earliest possible moment. If mine be but an idle fancy formed only as children always hope to obtain that which they desire, then you will do me a real favour to wake me from the idle dream of hope which is now upon me, for I may then the more readily fulfil that duty, which obedience to my mother requires of me. Forgive me my temerity, and may an eternal blessing abide with you and yours, is the wish of your attached

“SIGRID BIARNI'S DAUGHTER.”

This letter was written in the greatest haste, and as can be readily seen, rather from the impulse of feeling than from any mature deliberation, as is usual with women. There were blots here and there, as frequently happens in such letters, for the hand is not always calm when the heart is perturbed; wherefore such blots are called “love-drops,” and are not looked upon as blemishes.

But now the greatest difficulty still remained, namely, to get the letter to Ingeborg so that it should not be remarked; and Sigrid was in the

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greatest perplexity as to how she might accomplish this, for she had no confidant about her home to whom she dared to entrust it.

That same day Groa of Leiti came to Tung. Ingveld was sleeping when she arrived, and Groa, insisting that she should not be wakened, entered into conversation with Sigrid. Sigrid was unusually quiet, which Groa soon discovered, and said, therefore, in very friendly wise :

"Something has gone wrong with you to-day, my darling !"

"Oh no, Groa dear," said Sigrid ; "quite the contrary."

"I do not need to cross-question you about it. Something is the matter with you ; you are not always wont to be so serious. I should n't be surprised if you were worrying about that accursed gossip which is spreading so authoritatively through the neighbourhood, for it can hardly have failed to reach your ears."

"What is it, Groa ?"

"Why, have n't you heard what they are saying about you, my love ?"

"No, I have n't heard it. What is it ?"

"Well, you must n't mind it ; I can hardly bear to speak about it. It is nothing, only that they are for entangling you with that devilish Gvend of Burfell."

"Who is doing this ?"

"It is easy enough to see that it has most likely no better foundation than so many of the things you hear. God be praised that it is n't true ; it would be too much like casting pearls before swine, I had almost said. I had made up my mind not to come to your wedding, my love ! if you should marry that

lubber. I vow it is awful the way these devilish folk can lie—God forgive me that I swear—without any foundation whatever. It is the common talk though, throughout the parish ; but I denied it, and told them they would better hold their tongues from such gossip, for, as I say, there is no more likelihood of my Sigrid marrying herself to such a fellow as that Gudmund than there is of my swallowing him."

"It may well be, though," said Sigrid, sighing ; "there are those who would think it a good enough match for me."

"Ay, no wonder you shudder at the thought of it, sweet child ! much less——"

"The matter has been broached, nevertheless, Groa, and there are many things gossiped about which have less foundation."

"Dear me, it almost makes me ill, my sweet ! Why, I would have taken my oath there was nothing in it. I should like to know what that fool wants with a wife ? As for myself, I would rather sleep with a log of driftwood than with that Gudmund."

Sigrid remained silent, but could not keep from smiling as Groa chattered on : "I'll be bound my Ingveid gave him promptly the answer he deserved ?"

"I am not so sure that she thinks it such a very bad offer. He is well off."

"Ah, but of what profit is that to the wife when she has n't enough left under her control to be able to so much as give a bone to a dog ? But maybe you think he won't take after Bard in this respect, as he does in everything else ? How much control of affairs at Burfell did the sainted Gudrun have ? She would have had to steal it, if she so much as wished to give a bite to a hungry person. And besides she

had not as much of the food in her keeping as could be wound around your finger, or put in a cat's nose. I cannot believe that my Ingveld could be so blind as to let a child of hers get into such hands. This would surely never have happened if your father, the sainted Biarni, blessed light, had only lived."

"I quite agree with you in that," said Sigrid.

"Though I do n't wish to say anything but good of my sweet Ingveld, still the change can be seen here in a good many ways since he died, the blessed soul."

Groa spoke in a half-choking voice, at the same time wiping her eyes with the corner of her apron. Sigrid, who still felt the loss of her father most keenly, was always drawn toward any one who spoke well of him. She was deeply moved by Groa's words, and stroking Groa's cheek, said: "We must try not to think of him, my dear!" But Groa continued whining, and said: "I cannot keep the tears from coming into my eyes whenever I think of him, the dear man! But though I am in petticoats, it shall never come to pass that my Biarni's child shall get into their hands. I will give your mother such a hauling over the coals that she will never let herself or hers be drawn into such folly."

"I hardly think it is worth while for you to say anything to her about it, Groa dear! but if you really desire to do something for me, there is a small favour that I would like to ask of you." As she said this Sigrid looked straight into Groa's face, as if seeking to read her innermost thoughts,—she could see there nought but the purest faithfulness and sincerity.

"You can depend upon me, my darling! For though you had never done me a kindness, as you have time and time again, yet he who now lies in his

grave deserves of me that I should not be less willing than others to aid you in such small way as may lie in my power. But what is it, my love?"

"It is to get this letter over to Holl so that no one shall discover it, and bring me back the answer, and here is something to cover the postage," said Sigrid, handing her the letter, and with it a specie-dollar.

"Oh, what generosity! You seem to have inherited your parsimony, my dear! You have given me altogether too much," said Groa, giving Sigrid a demonstrative kiss.

"I do not need to remind you, Groa dear, not to mention this to any one about the house here!"

"No, indeed, trust little Groa for that! You need n't worry about that, my love. I am no fool; and when I once get a thing into my hands, no one can get it away from me, not even the king himself. I can keep a secret that has been entrusted to me, even if I am talkative. And besides it seems to me to be nobody's business, even if there should be something going on between Indrid and you. He is the right kind of a man."

At this moment Ingveld entered the room, and Groa, hastily concealing the letter, changed the conversation immediately, so that it might appear that they had been talking about something else. She remained at Sigridtung until late in the day, although not so long as was her custom.

Sigrid felt that she had given the despatch of her letter into good hands; but many days passed and still no answer came from Ingeborg. At last Groa came again to Tung, and Sigrid asked her how it had fared with the letter. She replied that she had gone

over to Holl with it the day after, and had given it privately to Ingeborg, who had no sooner read it than she burst out laughing, and threw it on the pantry-shelf, exactly as if she cared nothing whatever about it, and had given her no answer to bring back, although she had reminded her of it. Groa gave Sigrid this information with tears in her eyes, so that Sigrid saw no reason for doubting the truthfulness of the report. Malicious folk, however, whose habit it was to put the worst construction upon all of Groa's actions, reported that, upon a certain occasion long afterward, she had let slip to a good female friend of hers, that when they who sent letters had once paid for their transmission, they ought not to concern themselves as to their subsequent fate.

After this, Sigrid, feeling that all hope had vanished, fell into a state of utter disheartenment, while her mother never ceased to depict in golden hues the great desirability of a match with Gudmund. One day when Sigrid was sitting in the room wrapt in silence, her mother came up to her, and patting her, half smiling, on the cheek, said :

"May I not write to them soon and tell them that the bear is now captured? or have you not yet made up your mind to agree with me, my dear, that a good offer is not to be refused?"

"You would best decide, mother dear, what you should do. I know you would not persuade me to anything that you did not think would be for my good; and although I cannot bring myself to think favourably of it myself, still I know that it is my duty to abide by your wishes," Sigrid replied, as the tears stole down her cheeks.

"It is but natural, and I do not blame you, my

child," said Ingveld, patting Sigrid again on the cheek, "that you should feel a little hesitancy at first, but I am sure that you will thank God afterwards, that you followed my advice."

Sigrid could now no longer restrain her tears, and not wishing that her mother should see her weep, she arose and left the room, and thus put an end to the conversation. Ingveld taking Sigrid's words for an unconditional assent, wrote forthwith to Bard and Gudmund, telling them how the matter stood. Whereupon the foster-pair betook themselves to Tung, and Ingveld betrothed her daughter Sigrid to Gudmund. After this, Gudmund called occasionally at Tung. Sigrid was always very taciturn in his company, a fact, however, which did not seem to trouble Gudmund.

It was decided that the wedding should take place in the autumn, after the flocks had been gathered from the mountains, and that it should be celebrated at a farm called Hvol, where the chapel-of-ease of Sigridtung parish was situated, as the dwelling at Hvol was both larger and roomier than that at Tung. The banns were proclaimed on two successive Sundays, and were read on the latter day in two different churches at the same time. We have been informed by those learned in the law, that this mode of procedure is illegal; but we have also heard many clergymen of high standing defend such a course, if, for some important reason, it be necessary to hasten a marriage,—and the latter opinion was acted upon in the present instance. The wethers which Bard had selected for the wedding-feast were come from the mountain pastures, and he had hastened to slaughter them immediately, so that none of the tallow which they had gained in the summer should be wasted.

He had then called the clergyman's attention to the fact, that if too much time was consumed in publishing the banns, it might be that the meat would be tainted by the time the wedding-day came round.

The day before that appointed for the wedding, Bard and his foster-son were busily engaged in making everything ready. The principal room at Hvol was at the front of the house, and here a table had been placed, which extended the entire length of the room with benches on each side. Here all the distinguished guests were to be seated; the seats appointed for the bridal couple being in front of the middle of the gable, these were distinguished by two large velvet cushions placed upon the bench exactly at the mid-end of the table. On one side of the bride the parish clergyman and his wife were to be seated, next beyond them other visiting clergymen, and then the overseers and others of the leading farmers. Ingveld was to sit on the other side of the bridegroom, and beyond her the other guests were to be placed according to their relationship and rank. Out in the court-yard was a large store-house, which had been entirely cleared of its contents, and the walls hung with wadmal; here the lesser farmers and the retainers of the more distinguished guests were to sit. There were two long tables in this store-house. These had been constructed of empty tubs and chests arranged in rows, upon which smooth boards or unhinged doors had been laid, and the whole spread with cloth and coverlets. Such were the quarters of the proletariat. The food and drink were to be the same in both rooms, so that the only difference between them lay in the fact that the furniture and table service were more elaborate in the bridal apart-

ment than in the humbler room. A woman from the neighbourhood had been engaged to look after the preparation of the food, and men had been appointed to serve the guests at the banquet—Bard himself, however, proposed to look after the potables.

Tuesday, in the twenty-third week of summer,¹ everything was in readiness for the festivities which were to occur upon the morrow. Old Bard had seated himself out on the bank of the little brook, which flowed hard by the farm-house, and was engaged in ladling water out of the stream into a ten-quart keg, which stood beside him on the brook-bank, when Gudmund approached him and said :

“What are you at now, foster-father?”

“Oh, I am thinning this bothersome mead here a little; it seems so thick that I am afraid it has been adulterated.”

“Pah! I think you are more likely trying to make it go further.”

“Oh no, it will not be increased much by the few spoonfuls I am putting in the cask here. Are you all ready in the store-house, and do you think that it will hold all who are coming here to-morrow?”

“I do n’t know, I’m sure; such a swarm has been invited, I confess I can’t see the object in asking such a rabble.”

“I can’t either; but Ingveld would have it so, and I let her manage it as she wished; she will have to foot the bill for it though. You may depend upon it, I have n’t thought of making her a present of it.”

“No, I do n’t see any reason why you should. What are you going to charge her for brandy, the quart?”

¹ The last week in September.

"I let her have it at the same price I should get for it in the winter ;¹ is that unreasonable ?"

"No ; and the mead, what do you expect to get for it ?"

"Oh, ay ! I have it still to measure ; I am glad you reminded me of it. I suppose I ought not to ask a profit of more than four skillings the quart, and there must be about ten quarts in the cask here,—but do you know it's high time you were setting out, if you mean to get to Tung to-night, so as to be ready to start over with them to-morrow."

"So it is," said Gudmund, turning away.

¹ It is not only difficult to make journeys for provisions in the winter, but it frequently happens that the stock of wares at the trading stations runs very low in the winter season, and at such times commodities of all kinds command exorbitant prices.

VIII

THE weather was fine on the wedding-day, and every one at Hvol was on his feet betimes. Shortly after nine o'clock the guests began to arrive at the farm. The bridle path near Hvol was good, and the young men urged their ponies into their best paces as they came into the lane leading up to the house, to the no small enjoyment of the bystanders, who were looking on and passing judgment on the merits of the different steeds.

"There comes the clergyman on his sorrel, with two companions," exclaimed one of the group standing on the paved way in front of the house; "he always has something that knows how to carry its feet."

Bard, who was standing in the doorway, heard this, and shading his eyes with his hand, said: "Yes, that is certainly he, on his sorrel." Then turning round, he called loudly through the door into the house: "Have the little coffee-kettle ready, Helga, the clergyman is in sight. But who is that riding so furiously on the white horse, this side of the sheep-fold yonder?"

"It must be Thorstein, 'the hireling,' or the 'meat-beak,' as some people call him. Yes, it looks like him and his white mare."

"Why, he was n't invited," said Bard, half aloud, "but it is just like him; he never fails to have some business in the neighbourhood when there is any eating going on; I suppose there is nothing for it but to ask him to stay, now that he is here. But what has become of the bridal-pair, lads? do n't you see anything of them yet?"

"They have just now reached the home-meadow."

The morning was already far advanced when the bridal-couple rode into the court-yard before the house. Gudmund, in haste to be off, sprang from his horse, intending to assist the bride in dismounting; but his saddle had not been well girthed, and turned completely round, so that Gudmund, who had caught one foot in the stirrup and was, moreover, by no means agile, fell flat on his back in the mire, sadly besmearing his wedding garments. Certain of the guests in the court-yard hastened to assist Sigrid in dismounting, while others opened their clasp-knives and began to scrape the mud from Gudmund's trousers, the young men having their jokes the while, at Gudmund's expense. Sigrid went to the guest-room, and the guests thought that they had never seen a woman of fairer exterior or more noble mien, and many of them remarked amongst themselves that much misfortune was in store for a woman so fair, who should wed such a clumsy boor as Gudmund. Sigrid was very quiet during the day, but no one remarked it, for the wedding-day is so important an epoch in life that it seems but natural if the bride appear unusually grave.

The company now assembled in the church, and before the ceremony the congregation joined in sing-

ing the 309th psalm in the New-collection. At the last verse the deacon led the bridal-couple to the seat before the altar, and the clergyman began his nuptial sermon, for which he had chosen the text, "It is easy to promise but difficult to fulfil!" Seldom before had the Lord's holy servant, Síra Thomas, spoken so impressively and affectingly. The entire northern side of the chapel, where the women were seated, flowed in tears; and if it was dry in the choir and upon the southern side of the church, there were still very many strong men in that portion of the congregation whose hearts were agitated. Sigrid sat upon the bridal bench with folded hands, and all remarked her pallor and the anxious expression of her countenance, but Gudmund was entirely unmoved. He shed never a tear, but it was noticed that he now and then moved his lips and fumbled with his fingers, and those who were best acquainted with his character concluded afterwards, that this must have presented itself to him as a good opportunity to reckon up Sigrid's acres and rent-roll, rather than to heed and lay to heart the clergyman's precepts touching the Christian marriage relation. At the conclusion of the sermon the clergyman submitted the usual queries to the bridal-couple. Gudmund answered these correctly, no very difficult task, since the contracting party is simply expected to say "yes" to everything which is asked. After this the clergyman turned to the bride and said:

"Likewise I ask you, worthy young woman, Miss Sigrid Biarni's daughter, whether you have taken counsel of God in heaven, and of your own heart, and thereafter with your relatives and friends, to take

this worthy young man, Monsieur Gudmund Hansson,¹ who stands beside you, to be your husband?"

This question Sigrid answered with a "yes," but in a low tone of voice. Then the clergyman propounded the second query, and still Sigrid answered "yes."

"For the third time I ask you," the clergyman continued, "whether you are assured that you have never given your marriage troth to any man now living, which might hinder this wedding?"

It was as if Sigrid had suddenly awakened from a deep slumber. "No!" she exclaimed, and in such a loud tone that it could be heard throughout almost the entire church. The clergyman was not accustomed to such a reply as this, and was somewhat startled; all the members of the congregation were greatly astonished. The deacon, who was an old man, grown gray in the service, bethought him of the old adage: "Such things will happen in the sea, quoth the seal, who was shot in the eye;" the lass must have made a blunder and needs to correct her word. He sat not a great distance from Sigrid, and nudging her with his arm, said, "Say 'yes,' my love!" Sigrid remained as silent as the grave, and leaned against the back of the bridal seat, but the clergyman had now recovered himself, and again uttered the same words as before, in a loud and distinct voice. Sigrid remained silent. The pastor stared at her for a time, and then turning to the congregation, said:

"The Christian assembly has heard that the bride, Miss Sigrid Biarni's daughter, has replied in the negative to the queries of the Church; the ritual

¹ *lit.* Hisson. Those are thus called whose paternity is not clearly established.

does not permit me, good friends, to continue further; the young woman may have been taken suddenly ill."

Having spoken thus the clergyman retired from the church, and every one gathered about Sigrid, who was pale as death and said never a word. Most of the company thought she might have lost her speech, or be temporarily deranged, or both, and they led her back to the house and busied themselves for a considerable time in the endeavour to restore her. The guests began to realise that an end was put to the merry-making for that day, and so gradually, little by little, as the day waned they began to take their departure. In the evening Sigrid returned to Tung, and it was soon discovered that she had neither lost her wits nor her tongue; but she positively refused to take her place again beside Gudmund on the bridal seat. This report was soon widely spread through the neighbourhood and was variously received. Some said that it had happened as might have been foreseen, and that it was better broken off at the last moment than never; but there were very many who blamed Sigrid, and said that the event had not come entirely without premeditation. Thorstein "meat-beak," however, whenever the subject was discussed in his presence, expressed no opinion, but mumbling with his mouth, said: "Who do you suppose ate up all the joints there? My mouth waters whenever I think of them."

Many people egged on the foster-pair to bring an action against Sigrid and her mother, saying, that they were guilty of breach of promise. They refused to resort to extreme measures, but a compromise was effected whereby the mother and daughter agreed to

pay Gudmund six ewes in fleece and with lamb, in the flitting-days,¹ together with the expenses of the wedding-feast ; and with the payment of this penalty Bard and Gudmund declared themselves satisfied for the trouble to which they had been subjected. Ingveld did not lavish much affection on Sigrid while this was happening, and it became manifest that it would be advisable for Sigrid to leave Tung. Sigrid bore her trials with patient resignation, but was very quiet and sad ; and thus the winter passed.

¹ The "flitting-days" are always four: Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday in the seventh week of summer, usually at the beginning of June. In the present year, 1889, the first "flitting-day" falls upon the 6th of June. The "flitting-days" are therefore governed by the date upon which the first day of summer comes, and it follows that the first "flitting-day" can never come before the 31st day of May, and never later than the 6th of June. The so-called "Clergyman's flitting-day," however, always comes upon the 6th day of June.

IX

THIS same winter Orm Biarni's son, Sigrid's brother, was head-boy of the lower form in Bessastad school.¹ His place at table was on the lower bench in the

¹ The first Icelandic school was established at Skálholt in southern Iceland by Ísleif Gizurarson, in the century following the introduction of Christianity. From Ísleif's school came three distinguished pupils who severally established schools at Hólar, Haukadal, and Oddi. Of these the two schools at Hólar and Skálholt survived, but in the sixteenth century the scholarly spirit had so languished that it became necessary to organise these schools anew, and the present Icelandic Latin School, therefore, traces its origin from the two schools refounded at Skálholt and Hólar in the year 1552, these two places having been at that time the seats of the southern and northern bishops of Iceland respectively. These schools were, properly speaking, theological seminaries intended for the education of the clergy of the island. Re-created, shortly after the Reformation, by two Danish Lutheran bishops, the efforts of the schools were especially directed to the extirpation of the Roman Catholic religion from Iceland. In the year 1785 the episcopal see of Skálholt was abandoned and the school and bishop's seat removed to Reykjavík; in 1801 a similar fate befell the Hólar bishopric, and the school was then united with that of Reykjavík. A few years later the seat of the Icelandic bishop was removed to Bessastad, a few miles south-west of Reykjavík, and with it the school. The theological crusade for which the institution had been originally established, having been crowned with success, it gradually fell away from its purely theological capacity, until it became simply the Latin or High School of the country. In the year 1848 it was removed from Bessastad and installed in a new building in Reykjavík, where it has since remained, and where it has probably at last found a permanent abiding-place.

corner by Brunka,¹ and he shared in the eatables and drinkables of the worthies of the upper form, for this was one of the privileges of the king of the Skrellings,² more highly prized than all the rest, for the reason that the victuals were better and the milk purer than could be obtained by those who sat farther away. In the school Orm always sat behind the little table nearest the stove; he had chosen this seat himself for many reasons, first among which was the fact that it afforded a good vantage-ground, it being easier for one person to defend than for three to attack; and at this time the land of the Skrellings was in an almost constant state of siege. Orm's teachers had no especial claim upon him, and his regal dignity required of him no more arduous task than the leadership of the hosts of his subjects; he was, moreover, a battle-trying and gallant hero.

One day, soon after mid-winter, Orm sat in his seat in the school-room engaged in writing his Latin theme in his exercise book; there were few boys in the school-room, as it was meal-time. Orm had not gone to dinner for the reason that his enemy "sparta"³ was on the table. It was, in truth, held to be a great breach of decorum to remain away from meals, and most of the scholars were so easily influenced by public opinion that they went to the

¹ A table in the dining-room so nicknamed by the schoolboys. The members of the upper form sat at one end, the members of the lower form at the other end, and with these latter, occasionally, a few of the lowest in the upper form.

² The leader of the lower form. The ancient Icelanders called the Esquimaux whom they found in Greenland and America "Skrellings" (Skrœlingjar), and the name has since come to be an opprobrious epithet applied to the lowest orders of humanity.

³ The school name for a kind of meat soup.

dining-room and yawned over the soup, at least, even if they did not eat it. Some took their places at table not merely out of good-nature, but rather because they either wished to show their respect for all those concerned in the administration of "sparta," or because it occurred to them that the teacher who was in charge of the boys would observe their vacant places, and make a note in his memorandum-book of the fact that they had not come to the table. Orm, however, worried himself but little over such trifles, and only thought to himself: "Let them write it down, in Heaven's name, the good people, it will all come out the same sooner or later." Orm always had occupation enough when the students were in the room, and it therefore behooved him to improve every temporary cessation of hostilities to prepare his Latin themes, otherwise his exercise-book would not be ready for the teacher's assistant when he should come to collect the books from the scholars. The truce, however, was not destined to be of long duration; all at once a rattling and clattering was heard, as when a number of loose horses are driven over a stony way: this was the schoolboys dashing out from the dining-room, each in his own fashion. The same instant the school-room door was flung open, and a sturdy young fellow named Vigfus Oddsson dashed into the room. He was frequently on terms of hostility with Orm, and this same morning Orm, without any real cause, had asked for permission to go out in the midst of a lesson. Vigfus was sitting at the end of the long table close by the door, and just as Orm was passing out, and the teacher was saying to Vigfus, "You may continue!" Orm dealt his enemy such a box on the ear, that no

one remembered ever to have heard the like, the noise from the blow sounding throughout the room. Orm slipped out, and the slap was so dexterously given that there were but few who could determine whence it came. Vigfus stumbled in his reading and made bad havoc with his Latin translation, being angered and disconcerted by the assault. The morning's incident had thus been doubly impressed upon his memory, and as he came into the room he exclaimed: "I have n't forgotten our old sores, and I propose to begin by paying you for that box on the ear for which I have been owing you since morning!" and seizing an old Latin lexicon with both hands, as he spoke, he hurled it at Orm's nose, but the lexicon missed Orm and struck an ink-bottle, upon the desk, which was overturned upon Orm's exercise-book. Orm did not tarry long to consider, but shot over the table like a bolt, jumped upon Vigfus and endeavoured to throw him. The struggle which followed was long and severe, but it resulted at last in Vigfus's getting Orm down upon his back on a school bench, when, seizing him with both hands about the knees, he hurled him to the floor with himself above. Orm began to howl, and call upon the Skrellings to come to his assistance, and drag the malefactor from off him; but Orm was not so great a favourite in the lower form that any one seemed disposed to lend him succour; he was on better terms, however, with the upper form, and by a happy chance one of these, a lad named Thorarin, drew near to where the two boys were struggling.

"You seem to be in a bad way, friend Orm!" said he, "and inasmuch as you have half-way

promised me your sister Sigrid, it would be unmanly in me not to lend you aid."

"She is married to a lout out in the east," shouted one of the boys of the lower form.

"In that case we will have to wring his neck," said Thorarin, as gripping Vigfus with one hand, he whirled him back and away from Orm. Vigfus's friends saw this manœuvre, and four or five of them rushed upon Thorarin forthwith, but he defended himself with the greatest valour. This became the signal for a pitched battle; both classes joining in the affray, some helping one party, some the other; the upper form, however, for the most part siding with Thorarin, and the lower with Vigfus, and the contest became both protracted and scathful. So many incidents were occurring simultaneously that it would be impossible to give a detailed account of the passage-at-arms. School-books, entire or in pieces, flew through the room like snow-drifts; some of the lads seized the benches and brought them down upon the heads of others; some sprang upon the tables and fought from this ground of vantage; others took the small table, and, turning it over upon its side, occupied it as a kind of breast-work. In the general confusion the great *blanda* can¹ was overturned on the field of battle, and its contents spread in rivulets over the whole floor. The lower form wished to carry the contest into the schoolroom of the upper form, but four of the strongest of the upper form boys sprang to the door and barred the way against this onslaught.

The inspector of the school was upstairs in one of

¹ A large can in which the schoolboys' *blanda*, a drink made of whey and water, was kept.

the dormitories when the news was brought to him that the entire school was fighting, and that it was impossible to foresee where the disturbance might end. He gathered help together, and was amongst the combatants in the twinkling of an eye. Through his mediation the contest was soon brought to an end and the contestants reconciled, it having been adjudged that all injuries alike to garments and person were to be forgiven. A single exception was made in the case of a new boy, named Thori, who had sided with the lower form in the struggle, and being both large and strong had proved a valuable acquisition. The upper form refused to accept the peace unless he should be punished. It did not seem to them fitting that a *busi*,¹ such as he, should thus display his enmity toward the old and accomplished members of the upper class. The members of the lower form grumbled at this, but were compelled to accede, and Orm was selected to administer the punishment.² Thorir was now led out into the middle of the room, shaking like an aspen leaf, and then the precentor, snatching up the half of a Greek lexicon, which lay upon the floor, rent asunder in the affray, said: "The psalm is as usual, No. 101

¹ Freshman. The schoolboys called those pupils who entered the school in the autumn *busa* or *novibusa* (*sic*), probably fastened upon them by some new boy's blunder in declension.

² The punishment meted out to the malefactor was called "doing the iambics." The criminal was required to stand in the middle of the floor, with bent back and craned neck, while the student selected to administer the punishment jerked the head of the recalcitrant offender up and down in time with the psalm, which the school sang in chorus. The psalm named, which was one of the longest in the Collection, was always chosen for the purpose. The verses of the original being in iambics gave the name to the punishment.

in the Collection, 'When Israel out of Pharaoh's land.'" Just as they were beginning to sing, one of the boys hurried into the room, and said that there was a messenger outside with a letter, and that he desired to speak with Orm immediately.

"Then, friend Thorarin, I shall have to give into your hands the administering of the *busi's* punishment. It may be that this is a letter from the east, and a messenger from my mother; he can inform her to what a pass I am come with my everyday clothes," said Orm, hurrying out of the room and dragging after him the half of one trouser's leg, which was almost entirely torn away below the knee.

Orm recognised the man immediately. He had brought with him from the east two letters from Sigridtung, and Orm forthwith seated himself in the dining-room and began to read them. One letter was from his mother, the other from his sister Sigrid. With his mother's letter came two pairs of stockings and a pair of new wadmal trousers, which latter he felt had arrived most opportunely. His sister's letter was as follows:—

"DEAR BROTHER—I write you this letter in the greatest haste, to send it by a man who is going to the south, my object being to ask you to procure a comfortable home for me in a good family somewhere in the south; for matters have now come to such a pass here that I am anxious to get away from the neighbourhood at the earliest opportunity. As you have often told me how pleasant it is in the south, I have formed this determination in my emergency, and I hope that you will prove yourself a good brother to me. Since our father died, I have no one whom I can trust except you; and although you are a little frivolous at times,

still I know well your good heart. So many things have happened since you left that they hardly seem real; but I have no intention of repeating them to you until we meet, besides there are others, I suppose, who will have given you some account of these.

"That you are happy and well is the wish of your loving sister,
SIGRID BIARNI'S DAUGHTER."

Orm became unusually serious as he read his sister's letter, and sat for some time, after he had finished reading, leaning on the table with his face resting in his hands. While he was sitting thus, his friend Thorarin entered the room, and discovering at once that Orm was brooding over something, he spoke to him cheerfully, and said: "What's the matter with you, comrade? You look to me as if you had received a letter from your mother, and she had been lecturing you for laziness, boisterousness, and general carelessness."

"Maybe you think that would bring the tears into my eyes?" said Orm; "I can assure you in the first place that I don't read that kind of letters, and if I should by any accident, I should simply lay my hand upon my breast and say with the psalmist, 'With conscience void of offence,'—but on the contrary, I don't get that kind of letters from my mamma, and besides I see no reason why she should not be very well content with me. Every one is acquainted with my good character, and my industry and steadiness are evidenced by my constant upward progress."

"'They get higher in the air who have the stack under them,' and that is the way it is with you, comrade! New boys enter below you every autumn, and every one who comes raises you a little higher, but

up to the present time you have n't made much upward progress by your own exertions."

"I have had no light burden to contend against though, I can tell you, for my faculties have been steadily failing ever since I entered here. The autumn that I came and was chosen head of the *busa* my mental gifts were exceptionally brilliant, but I fell in mid-winter, and my faculties were so damaged that they have never caught up since. I had to be contented for a long time with my mediocre abilities, and have only recently begun to make an improvement, and to become clever again, for all which, I dare say, I am more indebted to the seat which I occupy than to my individual efforts."

"Well, then I should think you ought to be well content," said Thorarin.

"Alas, no ! because to solve the problem which I now have set before me I have need for more than mere cleverness."

"What manner of *crux* is this, pray ?"

"It is nothing other than to secure a good home for my sister Sigrid somewhere in Reykjavík."

"Has she separated from her husband ?"

"No, it is a long story ; she broke it off before the marriage, and now I understand that she can't bear to remain any longer there in the east after all that has passed, and so I find all her troubles come raining down on my devoted head."

"The difficulty does not seem to me to be a very serious one ; if you don't want her to go to Madam O——, then you would best arrange for her to go to Madam A——. I will speak to her about it myself if you wish."

Whereupon Orm inquired whether it would be a

pleasant home for Sigrid, to which Thorarin replied in the affirmative, adding that he knew Madam A—— to be an excellent woman. Whether their consultation was of short or long duration, the result of it was, that Thorarin was commissioned to obtain a domicile for Sigrid with Madam A——, with the express understanding that Sigrid was to have more liberty and privileges than are usually accorded to servants; and that she was not to have any coarse work to do, but was to be rather a companion and assistant to Madam A—— in all matters within the house, and this without wages. In brief, the result of the matter was that Sigrid came to Reykjavík in the spring.

Madam A—— was Icelandic by birth and education; she was handsome and in the prime of life, and was wedded to a Danish merchant in Reykjavík, who was at this time about forty years of age. He had come hither originally with a Danish merchant, who, after having remained several years in Iceland, had returned to Denmark, leaving A—— in charge of his establishment. A—— remained unmarried for some years, and soon accumulated a considerable property. At this period there was not much concord existing among the merchants of Reykjavík, and in consequence an opportunity was never lost to slander a competitor. One of the merchants sent such malicious reports to A——'s principal concerning his manager, that he dismissed him from his position. A—— built a house directly alongside, and began business for himself. At this time Thora, who afterwards became his wife, was regarded as the handsomest lass in Reykjavík. A—— selected her for his housekeeper, and soon afterwards married her. His friends up-

braided him, that he should not have made a richer and more worthy match; but he either paid no attention to their reproofs, or merely replied, "What ought I to have done?" or, "What would you have done in my place? I'm sure I have 'nt any cause to repent it." He spoke but the truth, indeed, for Thora was both handsome and well-bred. It was not, however, to be wondered at that his friends should think the match an unequal one. At this period Reykjavík was dominated largely by the customs of the Danes and those of "other great powers" whose gentry seldom wed with the daughters of common folk. Counts and barons are not indigenous in Iceland, and whither was she to look for these if not to the land which has showered upon her so many blessings?¹ Those who, from lack of landed estates, could not be earls in Denmark, were sent to Iceland to weigh stock-fish, measure linen, and dole out brandy, and were regarded as mighty barons when they came to Reykjavík, for, as was said, the branches cannot be inferior to the parent tree. Wherefore it was esteemed a sad misalliance that a Danish merchant should marry an Icelandic farmer's daughter. The high-born barons' wives could not, in consequence, forget this for a long time, or so far overcome their arrogance as to consent to admit Thora into their select circle. Madam A——, however, borrowed little trouble on this account; she looked after her home and her children, had few but good friends, and never directed her steps to those

¹ This bit of satire upon Denmark and the Danes was prompted by great abuses to which Iceland had been subjected for many years by the Danes both privately and officially. Since this book was written these evils have been greatly ameliorated.

places where she felt that she would not be received as an equal.

It was but natural that Sigrid's new home should be very strange to her at first; both the usages and manner of life were entirely different from those to which she had always been accustomed. She was quick to perceive that she had many things to learn which she had not known before, but of which it was less desirable to remain in ignorance than to seek to acquire. Madam Thora instructed her with great friendliness, and encouraged her in the acquisition of all such accomplishments as she thought becoming to Sigrid. There were two things which Sigrid felt that it was unnecessary for her to change, but which she rather made an especial effort to preserve,—these were her speech and her dress. She had, it is true, learned Danish from her brother, so that she understood it very well, but she had never spoken the language, and she deemed it better to endeavour to speak her own language correctly than to murder the Danish tongue. With the other members of the family, Danish and Icelandic were, as in every other household in Reykjavík, in sworn brotherhood, and Sigrid was the only individual in the house who could use any words of more than one syllable without making either the head or the tail Danish and the remainder Icelandic. Danish had this advantage in Reykjavík over Icelandic, that it was thought best that the children should be taught it before Icelandic, else, it was held, they could never acquire the proper pronunciation of the "r." At an advanced age it was seldom that a person could succeed in squeezing it as far down the throat as was necessary, and the only mode of acquiring the art

accurately was to begin the practice very early in life. This is the origin of the Reykjavík "r," which at that period made it an easy matter to distinguish a Reykjavíker, wherever in the world you might chance to meet him, even as it was with the speech of the Galileans in Judea.

The women's dress in Reykjavík seemed to Sigrid so oddly varied that she could not make up her mind which fashion she should adopt, if she were to decide to remodel her own garments. Some were clad in the extreme of Danish fashion from top to toe; and this dress she thought very becoming to those who were Danes. There were others Danish from head to waist, but Icelandic from there down; and yet again others as ancient above as if the upper garments had come from the time of the Sturlungs,¹ but with the lower half as modern as if it had just come from some Copenhagen *magasin des modes*. Sigrid adhered to the old fashion in her dress, her everyday costume consisting of the close-fitting knit jacket, the full black skirt, and the tasselled head-dress—a garb which was very becoming to her. She wore for her best garments, however, a handsomely embroidered jacket and skirt which her aunt had given her.

Although Sigrid found much of novelty in the town, she was no less the object of considerable interest to the townsfolk. It was no slight event in a village as small as Reykjavík then was, when a new-comer took up his abode there, it mattered not whether he came from over the sea or from the country. The excitement was the greater if the

¹ A famous family in the Icelandic history of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

stranger was a woman, and if she chanced to be very beautiful it became an event of unusual importance, and she the cynosure of all eyes. Still it was the young men of the village who were especially excited by Sigrid's advent ; the women, to be sure, took real pleasure in examining her critically from head to foot, and then in putting their heads together and comparing notes as to what they thought should be improved, but otherwise her coming was of no especial importance to them. With the young men, however, it was different ; they knew that here was, perhaps, an additional gem to be protected and coveted.

The first half month which Sigrid spent in Reykjavík, it may truly be said that two persons could scarce meet, without one or the other of them remarking somewhat in the following fashion : "Tell me, my friend, who is the young woman who has recently come to live with Madam A—— ; she is of medium height, fresh and well-formed, with beautiful light hair and expressive eyes ; she wears the Icelandic dress ; and, I believe, never goes out ?"

It was true enough that Sigrid was not much to be seen about the village ; she seldom left the house save when she had some errand ; moreover, she had no acquaintances except those who were in the house, one of whom, Gudrun Gisli's daughter, deserves especial mention. This Gudrun was distantly related to Madam A—— ; her father lived at Kialarness, and was a man in very moderate circumstances. Gudrun was fond of dress, and finding life at her father's home rather tedious, as she was possessed of considerable skill in handiwork, she had thought it preferable to endeavour to support

herself somewhere in Reykjavík, where she would not have to help with the haying and wool-dressing as at home. She had established herself, therefore, in Reykjavík and took in sewing for the women of the village, made garments for the scholars at Bessastad, and was always busy, for there was a scarcity of professional tailors in the town. She boarded with Madam A——, and occupied a small upper room, but during the day generally sat below with her friends. She had made a few attempts to marry, but without success, and now to all appearances she had turned her thoughts from such subjects, and was biding her time until a fairer wind should blow; and she had, indeed, ample time before her yet, since she was but just turned twenty.

Gudrun was a good-looking lass,—erect, with broad, well-proportioned shoulders, a slender waist, small hands and feet, shapely oval face, a small mouth and nose, and teeth as white as if they were of pure silver. She was not full-of-face, nor was she inclined to high colour, but her cheeks were smooth and her complexion clear and delicate. Her hair was fair, but not very abundant, and her small sparkling eyes were as black as “raven-flint.”¹ She was always cheerful and sociable, and although she had had no very great advantages in instruction in her youth, still she was perfectly self-possessed, and could readily adapt her words to the person with whom she was talking. Although Madam A—— liked the lass, she was still by no means in perfect accord with all her ideas. A friendship soon sprang up between Gudrun and Sigrid, both from the fact that Sigrid had few associates to choose from, as also

¹ A kind of obsidian found in Iceland.

because Gudrun endeavoured each succeeding day to be more friendly with her. She would neither sit nor stand except as best pleased Sigrid, and could go nowhere unless Sigrid was with her. Madam A—— was pleased to see this affection between Gudrun and Sigrid, but, nevertheless, took the opportunity to say privately to Sigrid one day: “If you will be guided by my counsel, Sigrid dear, you will never form so fast a friendship with any one, that you will not rather trust your own wisdom and experience than their advice, especially in a strange place, for it takes a long time to become thoroughly acquainted with any one. I do not say this to you with any desire to cause a breach between you and any of your acquaintances; I only desire to warn you that it is necessary to be constantly on your guard.” Sigrid thanked her for her sincerity, and promised to follow her advice, and her friendly relations with Gudrun continued without change.

X

ONE day early in the summer Gudrun came to Sigrid and said :

"Don't you want to go out with me for a little while to-day, Sigrid dear? I am thinking of going out to look through the new goods in the shops. Most of the ships have arrived, and the farmers will be coming in before long to make their purchases. We must make haste to buy anything we may want, and for which there is going to be any demand, before the trading-season begins, when everything will be picked up. It is pleasant out now, and there are few customers in the shops."

"I should enjoy it very much," said Sigrid. "I have nothing in particular to do to-day."

"I will go upstairs and dress directly; be sure to be ready by the time I come down."

To this Sigrid agreed; Gudrun accordingly went to make ready, and when she returned, a few minutes later, she found Sigrid already prepared to set out. On their way Gudrun turned to Sigrid and said: "There is one thing I wish to tell you, my dear, since you have but recently come from the country, and are strange as yet here in Reykjavík; you must throw off your old manner when we get into the

shops, and not be so stiff, as you are occasionally inclined to be. It is well to be lively with the merchants, and chaff them a little; there isn't any harm in it."

"I suppose they are careful, for all that," said Sigrid, "not to give too good bargains."

"If you don't gain anything by treating them in this way, it certainly would n't help you any to treat them worse. I have got the knack of it, and know how to manage them, my dear! You must abuse them at every other word, and pretend to find fault with everything, and the next moment you must flatter them. It is the only way to do if you want to get the advantage of them."

"But you can't speak exactly contrary to your convictions," said Sigrid.

"Oh yes, indeed, there is no harm in that, my dear Sigrid! You are a child in such matters yet, I see, but you will soon improve if you remain here long; I was just the same at first. But let us begin here."

They spent a good part of the day going from one shop to another, and examining the different wares. Gudrun behaved everywhere like an old acquaintance, and would go in behind the counters and take down from the shelves, for more critical examination, whatever struck her fancy. At times she found fault with everything; again, having made up her mind that she had carried this far enough, she would deliver a long and eloquent panegyric, but she never for a moment permitted her tongue to stand still.

"We sha'n't accomplish much to-day," said Gudrun, as she was leaving a shop in which they had

tarried for some time ; " the good soul managed to slip this into my hands, though ; it must contain at the very least two skeins of good silk twist."

" Why, I did not see it," said Sigrid.

" It was n't to be expected that you should ; for his master, who has an eye everywhere, did not see it either."

" Did he give it to you ?"

" I hardly think he will enter it in the books. He would be obliging enough, poor wretch, if he only owned anything, but he has n't a thing except what he—— but now let us go into Miller's shop, that has been a gold-mine to me this many a day."

This Miller, to whom the shop belonged, was a Dane who travelled back and forth between the two countries, living in Copenhagen in the winter, but spending the summer in Iceland. He was a good-looking young man, thought by the farmers to be rather tricky in his dealings. He did not deal largely in articles of necessity, but always had a large stock of kerchiefs and other luxuries, and was especially careful to have such articles as were not to be found elsewhere, and in consequence it was often almost impossible to turn around in his shop for the women. It so happened, however, that when Gudrun and Sigrid entered the shop there was no one there except the merchant, his clerk Christian, and a few seafaring men from Alptaness, who were dawdling about in the hope that some one might treat them to a "schnapps." As they were entering the shop, Gudrun said to Sigrid, " It is a pity that you can't jabber a little Danish, for Miller likes it much better."

" Yes? I fancy I shall hardly learn it to-day," said Sigrid.

"You can at least say *gu moren*,¹ my dear. That is better than nothing for a beginning."

As they walked through the shop, Gudrun added : "You will see kerchiefs and finery here rather different from those which most of the poor wretches here keep."

Gudrun raised her voice when she spoke, and it was evident that she did not care if she should be heard. Merchant Miller was bending down over his books when they entered, but, when he heard the girls' voices in the shop, he glanced up, and then went forward and saluted them ; "And who is the handsome lass whom you bring to me now, my good miss?" he said to Gudrun.

"Why, don't you know her? She has been in Reykjavík over two months ; her name is Miss Sigrid Biarni's daughter ; she came from the east in the spring to live with Madam A——"

"I have heard it mentioned that some handsome young woman had come there to live, but I have never had the pleasure of seeing her before. I am so tied down by business drudgery that I never get a moment's time to find out how many additions there have been here in Reykjavík since I left last year."

"Well, it is for you now to receive your guests and prospective customers graciously."

"That is a matter of course," said the merchant ; "I hope you will find my stock complete. Be pleased to come inside and look at what I have. Christian, fetch us a bottle of wine ! I shall be glad to drink a welcome to my guests and prospective customers. Please to walk inside."

¹ The Danish words are *god morgen* ! (good morning).

The two companions went inside the counter, and after the merchant had helped them each to a glass of wine, they began to examine the kerchiefs, while the merchant waited upon them with obsequious politeness. It was evident that Sigrid had created a decided impression upon him, although he addressed his conversation less to her than to Gudrun. After they had looked at the kerchiefs for some time, Gudrun said: "It does not seem to me that your kerchiefs now are as pretty as those you had last year; your linens and cloths are certainly very superior, and your dress-goods are handsomer than any I have ever seen before, but I do n't see shawls anywhere. Have you forgotten them, Mr. Miller?"

To this the merchant replied that he had not entirely finished unpacking yet, and that the handsomest shawls were in a box up in the loft, and he called upon his clerk to show the friends up if they wished to look further. Sigrid suggested that they would hardly have time for this on the present occasion, as it was now time for them to be returning home again; but Gudrun decided that she would like to see some of them, and she accordingly went up with the clerk, while Sigrid remained below in the shop, and the merchant measured the linen which she had selected. When this was finished, Gudrun had not yet returned, and Sigrid waited in the shop, while the merchant entertained her, asking her about this and that, as it occurred to him, and treating her with the greatest civility.

At last Sigrid began to tire of waiting, and had just determined to take her leave, for she could not muster the courage to request the merchant to call Gudrun, when at that very moment Gudrun and Christian

made their appearance. Sigrid noticed that Christian said something aside to the merchant, and then led Gudrun to the shelves, and had her select a silk kerchief; and it was by no means the poorest which was chosen. The two friends then took their departure and returned together to their home.

A short time after this shopping expedition, Gudrun said one day, in the course of a conversation with Sigrid:

"It seems to me life has come to a pretty pass here in Reykjavík, when you can't take a couple of steps apart with a man without having it gossiped about."

"I have always found that we cannot be too circumspect," said Sigrid.

"You may well say so; but do you know what is the chief subject of gossip now, here in Reykjavík?"

"No, I see so few people."

"It is nothing less than that everybody is linking me with that Christian, Miller's clerk. It is the last thing that I should ever have thought of their doing, for there is usually some reason for everything."

"I hardly think this can be true; it is most likely only of your own imagining; I have never heard of anything of the kind."

"I can understand that they would take good care that you should not hear it, for fear you would repeat it to me; but I have heard that a poem has appeared somewhere out at Alptaness,¹ about my going up into the loft with him the other day to look at the shawls, as you will remember."

"I thought at the time it would have been more

¹ The poem which appears in the original has been omitted.

prudent not to go, and that was the reason I spoke to you as I did ; but where did you hear this ? ”

“ I have heard it said that three gossips have been sticking their noses together about it in at Madam ——’s ; they do n’t tell about their own sea-voyages, however. But it does n’t matter ; it is all one to me what they see fit to gabble about.”

“ The trouble was that he let every one in the shop see him give you the shawl.”

“ What if he did give me that trumpery shawl ? I suppose I have done as much for him which has n’t been entered in the account. But let them gossip. I do not propose to worry myself about every bit of tittle-tattle that is carried from house to house. I shall be more annoyed if they do not let you rest in peace, but begin to pair you off with Merchant Miller ! ”

“ I hardly think it probable that they will do that.”

“ There is just as much reason for that, though, as for the gossip about Christian and me.”

“ I do not know why you should say that ; you know well enough that I have scarcely seen him except in the shop there the other day.”

“ So you think that no one remarked those sly little glances he cast at you ; I suppose you do n’t know what such glances mean ? ”

“ Oh, no ! ” said Sigrid, changing colour slightly as she answered.

“ And it was so difficult to hear his deep sighs when he was talking with you. Fy ! my ears sing still when I think of them. You fancy, I daresay, that no one heard them but I ; and then at the last he kissed his fingers to you as you were leaving, did n’t you see that ? ”

"Yes, I saw it, but I did n't know what it signified."

"Oh, my dear, I can tell you they have a great many tricks here of which the people in the country have no idea! This much I know, however, that he has taken a fancy to you. I spoke with him the day before yesterday, when I happened to be in the shop for a moment, and he began immediately to talk about you, and ask me about you, and ended by bidding me present you his compliments, and tell you that he hoped to see you some time soon again."

"I think it is hardly likely that I shall make any effort to see him, and I beg of you that you will not be the first to spread such gossip as this."

"You can rest assured that I shall never mention it to any one, except, as I speak to you, in confidence. But it is quite another matter if I rejoice on your account that he has formed an attachment for you. Who knows but that it may end in your becoming his wife? It may, indeed, be said that you did not come here to the south for nothing, if you should be so fortunate as to get for a husband such an immensely rich and handsome man, and a merchant into the bargain."

"It is not absolutely necessary to come to the southern part of the country for the sake of marrying, my dear!"

"Pray, what kind of a husband can you get out in the country, Sigrid dear? At the best a clergyman. Do you look upon that as equivalent to being a merchant's lady here in Reykjavík?"

"It seems to me most fitting for us farmers' daughters to marry farmers; so far as I am concerned I aspire no higher than to obtain a farmer for my husband, if, indeed, it shall be my fate to marry."

"Well, for my part, I don't particularly fancy those blessed farmer-bumpkins. These Reykjavíkers certainly have the advantage of being more agreeable to look at, and of moving about without the innumerable crooks and humps of our blessed rustic swains; for although they may have been only a fortnight in a shop here in Reykjavík, yet they seem, immediately, to acquire more agreeable manners than belong to the country boors."

"You are letting your tongue run away with you, Gudrun! I cannot hear my young countrymen slandered in this fashion," said Sigrid, turning away, and thus putting an end to the conversation.

Thus the summer passed, without any occurrence worthy of note, and the time arrived when the ships began to leave. It was then announced that Merchant Miller did not intend to leave Reykjavík that autumn, but having fitted out his ship, he despatched it to Copenhagen. Now that the trading-season was at an end, he had little to occupy his time, and so began to call more frequently at Merchant A——'s house, and would often sit, conversing with A——, for hours together.

The summer vacation was now at an end, and the school-boys began to return from the country. Sigrid's brother Orm came among the first, and very joyful was the meeting between the brother and sister. Orm brought with him a letter from their mother Ingveld to Sigrid, which was rather affectionate in tenor. Ingveld wrote that she missed her daughter greatly, which was not at all improbable, as some people are so constituted that they miss those persons most whom they can never treat properly when they are in their presence. Orm remained for some days in Reykjavík,

and then departed for Bessastad, where he had decided to remain until the school should open. Merchant A—— and his wife invited him to come to see them as often as he should feel so disposed, and should have the opportunity to visit his sister.

One day at this season, and soon after Orm's return to the south, the annual gathering and division of sheep was held at the Kollafirth-fold, a few miles from Reykjavík. As the weather was fine, and the roads in good condition, many of the townsfolk rode out for amusement to the fold. There were many women, almost every young girl in Reykjavík, and as many men as could spare the time for the holiday. Indeed so great was the demand for riding-horses in the village, that the supply fell short, and very many persons, who had expected to go, were compelled to remain at home.

Merchant A—— and his wife rode thither, and Gudrun had somewhere succeeded in obtaining a horse, but Sigrid was unprovided with a steed, and it seemed very probable that she would have to remain at home, much as she desired to go, for she had never been out in that direction. Miller had a gray horse, a northern pacer of superior blood, of a peculiar stock,¹ at that time renowned throughout the country. This horse was well fed and carefully groomed during the winter, and seldom used during the summer; for he was rarely mounted by any one save his master, and it was of little use to ask to borrow him, no matter how great the need. It was now almost noon, and every one who had obtained a horse had left the town; but Sigrid had not yet succeeded in securing

¹ Literally of *Bleikdla* stock, a strain of (originally) dun-coloured horses with a dark stripe down the back and black manes and tails.

a steed, although Gudrun had waited for her, hoping that she might at last prove successful.

"There seems to be no chance left now, Sigrid dear! I am afraid you will have to remain behind, unless you will ask Merchant Miller to loan you his gray; to the best of my knowledge it is the only horse left in Reykjavík," said Gudrun.

"That I certainly shall not do; besides it is hardly to be expected that he would lend him to me, as he will never lend him to any one else."

"I know that he has refused the horse to three or four persons this morning; but what do his flattering remarks about you amount to, if he does not make a distinction in persons? Run to Merchant Miller's, little Svend, and tell him that Sigrid, who lives at Merchant A——'s, bade you ask him to lend her his gray horse to ride out to the sheepfold to-day."

Little Svend hurried off, and soon made his appearance again, leading the gray by the bridle. He reported that the merchant had requested him to explain that he had not known that she intended to go, or he would have offered her the horse without being asked.

"Do you see now, my dear," said Gudrun, "how generous Miller can be when he likes? I knew what the result would be if you were to make a request of him; he would not have done this, though, for any other person in Reykjavík. It is exactly as I told you, though you will not believe it."

"I am no more convinced than I was before," said Sigrid, "but as I now have a riding-horse we would best be starting."

So the friends set out, and, as their horses were good, they overtook the main body of those who had

left before them, not far from the banks of the river Hellir. Many of the folk were amazed when they saw Sigrid come galloping up on Miller's gray, and marvelled greatly that she should have received the preference over so many other applicants. During the day the people enjoyed themselves at the fold, and as they did not begin to return home until evening, it was after nightfall when they arrived at Reykjavík again.

XI

It behooves us now to turn our attention again to Indrid Jonsson, whom we left sitting at home at Holl pining for Sigrid. For a long time he remained without interest in anything, to the great distress of his father and his family, who advised him to banish Sigrid from his thoughts, and seek a wife elsewhere ; for, as they said, it would not be necessary for him to tarry long upon his knees before any of the farmers' daughters in the shire. Indrid, although he did not receive their advice with favour, had no meeting with Sigrid during the next winter after the interview between Ingeborg and Ingveld, for he believed that Ingveld had spoken the truth when she had said that Sigrid was not inclined to look favourably upon his suit ; and when it was announced that Sigrid was to marry Gudmund Hallason, the little doubt which had still lingered was finally dispelled.

Indrid was a skilful artisan in both iron and wood, and had a widespread reputation for his handicraft in the east, and also in the north. There was a man named Snorri, living at Bard in Thingey-shire, a rich man and a skilled husbandman, who sent word to Indrid to come to the north and build an addition

to his dwelling. Indrid's parents urged him to undertake this, as they felt that he would be more apt to regain his wonted spirits if his mind should be completely occupied with some important work, and Indrid was at length prevailed upon to go to Bard. This occurred at about the time when the marriage banns of Gudmund and Sigrid were being read. Indrid remained in the north during the winter and until late in the spring, and during this time the state of his mind had so much improved that he was now always cheerful and talkative in company, although it was still apparent that he seemed to be brooding over some secret sorrow.

When he had finished the work upon the house he returned to Holl, arriving at his home soon after Sigrid's departure for the south. He learned then the history of the rupture between Gudmund and Sigrid, and was not a little surprised at the news. His imagination began to be aroused, and he now upbraided himself for not having spoken himself with Sigrid, and he resolved forthwith that, come what might, he would see her. His parents informed him that Sigrid had escaped him, as she had already gone to the south. Indrid was not, however, to be thus deterred from carrying out his intention. Late in the mowing-season he set out for Reykjavík, telling no one, however, whither he was bound until he came to Borgar-firth, where he met a man from the southern part of the country who had been working in the north during the summer, and with whom he joined company. The southerner knew the way, while Indrid had never been over the road before. Indrid was pleased to find such a companion, and although he was distraught

and dull, still he could not help being amused with his companion, for he was a merry fellow, and could always find something diverting when he felt that Indrid's troubles were weighing heavily upon his mind. One day, after they had entered Gullbringa-shire, as they were riding away from a farm-house at which they had stopped, Indrid inquired :

"Is it far now to Reykjavík, Sigurd?"

"Could n't you find that out from the milk they gave us to drink?"

"No, I don't see how it would be possible to discover that from the milk."

"Ah yes! It gets thinner and thinner, my dear fellow, like the Icelandic, the farther south you go. Such has been my observation at least, and I have travelled over this road here a good many times."

"I will make a note of this discovery," said Indrid.

They were now following the path traversing the Moss-fell district, and Indrid, becoming somewhat fatigued with riding, suggested that they should go up to some farm-house and get something to drink.

"Wait a bit," said Sigurd; "we shall soon be at the Hellir."

"Is it a farm?" said Indrid.

"No, it is a cow."

"A cow?"

"Yes, the cow of us wayfaring men, which never goes dry. But be that as it may, methinks our milk and our Icelandic are now about as thin as they are likely to become, for here we are at the Hellir."

They dismounted from their horses and laid down to drink from the stream; Sigurd drank in long draughts, and then slowly rising held his hands on his breast as if he were ill.

"You have foundered yourself with too much water, comrade!" said Indrid.

"Worse than that," said Sigurd, "I felt some big creature go down my throat; I am very much afraid it was a salmon."

"I congratulate you if it be so," said Indrid, half laughing. "It is seldom that God's blessings come up from the sea to leap into your mouth without any effort on your part."

"Do not laugh at my misfortune, comrade! Do you know who owned it? The fish belonged to the king, and it is difficult to foresee what the Government may say about this, for you should never do anything until you know how the king will like it. I vow, though, I could n't help it."

After this Indrid and Sigurd mounted their horses again, and the twilight was beginning to fall as they rode over the sand hills near Reykjavík. Sigurd did not recover his cheerfulness, however, but sat murmuring to himself over and over again: "What a bother! If I could only have written to the Government beforehand for a license to swallow the fish."

Thereafter he rode on in the lead in silence, until Indrid said:

"Where do you intend that we shall stop over-night, comrade?"

"We will ride up to Raudará and remain there over-night, for I do not like to get into Reykjavík so late."

"Who lives at Raudará?"

"I don't know what his name is. I call everybody who lives there Eirik, although the farm changes hands every year."

"What's your reason for that?"

"Because he is always hunting horses;¹ but I do n't think worse of him for that."

They rode up to the house at Raudará, and as they saw no one outside they knocked at the door. A woman came out, whom they greeted, and then inquired for the master, to which she replied that he was out hunting horses.

"We can soon make our errand known," said Sigurd; "we two companions wish to get shelter here for the night, and pasture for our horses."

"People who are acquainted in these parts seldom ask for night-quarters here. Perhaps, however, you are so much of a stranger that you do not know that we have not many beds here on the South-nesses? There is only one here in the house, and we, who live here, sleep in that ourselves, so there is n't any room to spare, for we are five in all, and two little ones besides. The master will take care of your horses, though, I know, if you have your own hobbles; the charge is four skillings a day."

"The prospect is anything but encouraging," said Sigurd, "and for my part I do n't mean to be the ninth. But we can leave our horses here, Indrid!"

"There seems to be a farm-house out there on the Cape," said Indrid.

"It is n't a farm-house though, my beloved; it is the bishop's house."

"What can we do better than ride thither? besides I should like very much to see the bishop's seat."

"Then we shall have to part company, for although

¹ A pun in the original upon the name Eirik and the words *ey rek*, which are similarly pronounced but signify a perpetual hunting (for horses). Travellers visiting Reykjavík are accustomed to leave their steeds in charge of the proprietor of the farmstead of Raudará, the nearest farm to the town.

it isn't a great way off, still, next to crossing the *Óððasahraun*,¹ it is the last road in all Iceland that I would think of travelling after nightfall. It is only by the hardest that our Lord can get the bishop himself over it, such is the task the road-commissioners have imposed upon Him. We would better dismount from our hacks and proceed on foot to Reykjavík."

Indrid replied that he would be guided by his advice, and therefore, leaving their horses and baggage behind them at Raudará, they set out together for Reykjavík. It was almost bed-time, and dark as pitch when they came to the town, and as they descended the road past the governor's house, a party of men and women on horseback dashed by them down into the town; as they were laughing and talking merrily together, Indrid and his friend concluded that they must live in the village.

"Where can these people be coming from?" said Indrid.

"I don't know, I'm sure, but I think it is most likely that they have been on some pleasure excursion to-day; possibly they are coming from the sheepfold, for this is about the time for the division of sheep up at Kolla-firth, and they usually go out there for amusement from Reykjavík."

"It seems to me that they are all speaking Danish; does n't any one in the town speak Icelandic?"

"There would indeed seem to be a good deal of truth in the saying that you people of the East-firths

¹ "The desert of misdeeds," a great tract of lava somewhat to the eastward of the centre of Iceland, desolate and untravelled. It is so called from the popular legend that it is peopled by outlaws. A son of the author of this book, Thorvaldur Thóróddsen, was the first person to explore this hitherto unknown region, in the summer of 1887.

are mis-wise. The man from the Horn-firth a few years back was more clever, for he could see that it was n't the Horn-firth moon that came up in the trading-station."

"That is true," said Indrid; "he was wiser. But whither are you taking me, comrade?"

"I was going with you to Tipple-John's, if he is n't dead, so that we could get refreshment of some kind; however, he does n't keep anything for sale but brandy."

"I have no great craving for that; I would rather find a bed and get to sleep. There must be lodgings enough here, somewhere, I should think."

"Well, rather! We are just now alongside of two; the only question is whether you would prefer the lee of this boat here, or the shelter of the gable of the shop over there; though I can't promise that there may not be room for criticism of the sheets, as there are so many who stop here."

"Well, I'll not put them to the test; but, joking aside, is n't there any place where we can lie with a roof over our heads?"

"It is n't such an easy thing for everybody, but I have an acquaintance here with whom we can at least try our luck."

Sigurd's acquaintance lived in a house not far from the club, and thither they directed their steps. The proprietor of this house, with whom they succeeded in obtaining lodging for the night, was an Iclander named L——, who was employed in some capacity about one of the trading-houses. Thither Indrid and Sigurd betook themselves, and there they tarried overnight. The accommodations offered them were not elaborate, and the guests were, therefore, bestowed in

the same chamber in which L—— and his wife slept. The married couple occupied a bed near the window, while the two guests slept together in a bed by the door.

Indrid awoke early in the morning, and opening his eyes, saw the housewife, who had already risen, sitting half-clad by the window, which looked out on the street. With one hand she was engaged in drawing on her right-hand stocking, while with the other she held up the window-curtain, and was in the act of looking out. Indrid, not wishing that the goodwife should become aware that he had been awake while she was dressing, drew the coverlet gently over his head; but at that very moment the housewife cried out, and in so loud a voice that every rafter in the house rang. Sigurd slept on, utterly oblivious, but Indrid thought it advisable to wrap himself up more thoroughly in the bed-clothes, for he half fancied that the cause of the outcry had been that the good woman had discovered that he had been looking. The husband, who had hitherto remained uncovered and motionless in bed, was aroused by the outcry, and startled, he leaped up from the bed, but promptly recovering his composure he glanced at his wife, and said :

“God have mercy on you, wife! What is the matter with you now?”

The goodwife heaved a deep sigh and said :

“L——, sweet! will you only look?”¹

¹ It is impossible to preserve in translation the chief humour of the dialogue which follows. It is couched in a ludicrous combination of Danish and Icelandic, the Reykjavík dialect of the period. This absurd patois has almost entirely disappeared since the removal of the school from Bessastad to Reykjavík, and since the first appearance of this book, which latter may not have been without its influence.

"What is there to see?"

"Why, how it is pouring."

"God be praised and glorified for it," said the master of the house, as he began to draw about himself again the bed-clothes, which he had cast off when he started up in his fright; but his last words only moved the housewife to cry out again:

"Oh, merciful Father! Do n't blaspheme so, man!"

Having thus spoken, she raised her eyes, filled with tears, toward the ceiling, exactly as if she expected that God's righteous anger would immediately reveal itself in thunder and lightning and strike her husband dead in his bed.

"Well, well! may I not be allowed to praise God for the rain?" said her husband. "Does n't it come from Him as well as every other kind of weather? Is n't it better than frost and cold? Or, I should like to know, can we here in Reykjavík do without rain any better than the other creatures and animals which live and crawl upon the earth? I know at least one good thing that will result from it, and that is that you will have to stay at home to-day, dear heart, and can mend my breeches!"

"Your breeches! So you think that I will have an opportunity to attend to them to-day?"

"Yes, I thought you might. How long do you expect me to keep nagging at you to do what must be done some time? Have you any errand important enough to take you out of the house in such weather?"

"Have I an errand!"

"Not much of a one, I fancy!"

"You ought to know without being told that I must share that story with Stina——"

The housewife was not permitted to say all that

she had intended, for her husband interrupted her in the midst :

"It is all one to me what the deuce you think it worth your while to gabble and run on about," said he, turning over in bed. Just as the last word passed his lips the door of the room was suddenly thrown open, and a woman entered. The housewife and the new-comer had no sooner set eyes on each other, than, seized by a common impulse, they ran toward each other and both cried out with one voice, so that you might almost have believed that the two exclamations had issued from the same throat. The husband first stared at the new-comer, and then thrusting his head beneath the bed-spread, he drew himself down into the middle of the bed. The stranger and the housewife, however, stood in the middle of the room for some time, embracing each other with as much friendliness and demonstration as if they had not seen each other for many years, and one of them had just escaped from a shipwreck.

For a long time Indrid could make out nothing of what they said, but at length he heard the housewife exclaim :

"Heavens, Stina ! you can't imagine how anxious I was to speak with you ; you can hear the story now, though ! Only think ! Miller is engaged !"

"That cannot be possible ?" said the new-comer, starting as if some one had stabbed her in the side with a knife.

"Yes, it is absolutely certain. I heard it stated positively at Larsen's yesterday."

"And to whom ?"

"That's the best part of all ! To Sigrid Biarni's daughter !

"No, really! well I am indeed astonished! with that little nurse-maid at Madam A——'s, eh? I can't somehow believe that you've got the right of it!"

"I assure you it is absolutely settled."

"Gracious goodness! why he must be stark mad! Now I begin to understand why he has been running to the house there every single day. But what do you say? Don't you think he is crazy to betroth himself to such a hussy? Why she is nothing more than a nurse-maid, pure and simple."

"It is one of the best things I ever heard; only think, he let her ride his gray horse out to the sheep-fold yesterday."

"Well then it must indeed be true, for otherwise he would certainly never lend his gray to anybody—but what do you think old Madam B—— will say to it? she will go crazy; do n't you think so?"

"You can imagine, Stina, how it will amuse her, ha! ha!"

"We would best go and see her at once and tell her the story."

"Yes, but do n't you think it would be best for us to stop at Miss Kilsen's on the way there, and get her to go with us to the old lady's; she is such a capital hand at gossiping, ha! ha!"

"Yes, by all means, we must have her with us. Oh, this is divine!"

These were the last words which Indrid heard of the conversation between the housewife and the visitor, for with this last remark they both hurried out of the room amid much noise and rustling of garments.

XII

WHEN Indrid heard Sigrid's name mentioned in the conversation he had drawn the coverlet away from about his head, so that he might hear better and catch the drift of the conversation; and although it was no easy matter for one unskilled in the Reykjavík dialect to follow the conversation, still he made out that the most important news of the moment in Reykjavík was, that a certain Merchant Miller was to marry some lass by the name of Sigrid Biarni's daughter; and although Indrid might naturally enough have concluded that there could be several of that name in Reykjavík besides Sigrid of Tung, still he could not help imagining that it must be she whom he had come thither to see, and he was, therefore, not a little disturbed by these tidings.

Sigurd waked soon after, and rising immediately, he and Indrid, as well as the master of the house, began to dress. They were all three silent and moody, each for his own particular reasons: Indrid was brooding over what he had heard—of all things the last piece of news he could have wished to hear; the host held his trousers up before the window, before he drew them on, and blushed; while Sigurd,

yawning and stretching, said that just before he waked he had dreamed that there would not be any fish caught at the Cape that winter but skate and other riff-raff.

L—— informed his guests that matters were in such shape in the cottage that it would be impossible for him to give them anything to eat before his wife returned, and that it would be best for them, if they had any errands out in the town, to attend to them first, returning to the house in the course of an hour, when he would probably be able to offer them something. As it had ceased raining when they sallied forth, Sigurd suggested that they should walk up to the School-cairn,¹ so that he might show Indrid the view of the surrounding country. Indrid approving the suggestion, they accordingly walked out of the town and ascended the hill. When they had come within a short distance of the cairn, they saw two young women not far in front of them, one of them leading a child by the hand.

"Let us walk a little faster," said Indrid, "so that we may pass those young women. From behind, the one upon the left greatly resembles a lass with whom I was acquainted in the east; I believe I know her."

"I do n't believe I want to join in the chase; it is undoubtedly some one from Reykjavík," said Sigurd. They increased their pace nevertheless, but as they were so near the cairn, the young women had already passed behind it when they reached it.

"They will be coming back before long, I think,"

¹ Now a small stone tower, on the ridge east of Reykjavík, from which a finer view is to be had than from any other outlook in the immediate vicinity of the town.

said Sigurd, "and then you can see her; but now that we are up at the cairn let us have a look about us."

They mounted the cairn, Sigurd remaining silent for some time and looking all about him, until at last he exclaimed :

"Satan ought to have brought our Lord hither, a few years back, when he wanted to show Him all the treasures of the earth and the glory thereof. It must have been hither that our Jörgensen¹ came when the devil prompted him to clear the way for his kingdom, to assemble his body-guard, lay siege to Reykjavík, and compel the Danes to surrender their strongholds ;—but I do n't see what you find to stare at out there on the dunes ; you are not paying a bit of attention to what I am saying."

"Oh yes, indeed I am, Sigurd !"

"That mountain there to the south is Keilir, that solitary conelike peak. From whatever point you view it, the sun is always directly over it at mid-day. There is Hafnar-firth, but you can't see the trading-station itself, because of the lava stream on

¹ This Jörgensen was a Danish adventurer, who in the early part of this century, by reason of a series of artful misrepresentations, succeeded in convincing an English trader that a certain cargo of his in Reykjavík was in jeopardy at the hands of the Danes. Under mask of the Englishman's authority, in the shape of a cannon on the deck of his vessel which threatened to lay waste the capital, the wily rogue actually succeeded in capturing and confining the governor of the island, and having formed a body-guard of Icelandic ne'er-do-wells, he established himself as "the protector of Iceland." His rule was short-lived, however, for a sloop-of-war appeared in the harbour not long after, and Jörgensen was summarily deposed. Explanations ensued between the governor and the Englishman—the latter, it would appear, had never had direct communication with the Government before—matters were satisfactorily adjusted, and Iceland passed again, peaceably, under the yoke of Denmark.

this side ; under the hill, toward which I am pointing now, is Gardar ; and that is Alptaness, where the Alptanessers live—but I believe you don't hear a word I am saying ; you are all the time looking over toward the dunes !”

“Yes, I have been listening, Sigurd, to everything you have said.”

“That is Bessastad which stands out on that neck of land between the two bays. That is Lambhus, there where the church is, and that is Greystone, that great mass of rock out on the Cape ; next we come to Skerja-firth, and beyond it to Seltjarness. What do you think of it all ?”

Indrid made no reply, and Sigurd, looking him directly in the face, said :

“I believe I can guess what you are thinking, comrade ! The same thought has, doubtless, occurred to you which came into my mind the first time that I was here. I said to myself, the good God has made many places better than this naze here, but the works of man are great, and Reykjavik itself is indeed something worth looking at. I can't tell you much about the buildings ; I know very few of them, except the cathedral, which stands right on the edge of the tarn, and the earl's manor, on this side of the brook. How true it is that great changes befall in a lifetime ; that was the House of Correction in my younger days, where John the soldier and lame John¹ resided, most economically. Who would have believed that it would ever become the governor's seat ! Here, again, on the right you see the heaps of peat which the people here quarrel and wrangle about, just as old jades turned out in the winter fight over a little poor fodder.

¹ Two of Jörgensen's body-guards.

Those are the warm springs¹ farther along, where the vapour is rising, so conveniently situated for washing off your Icelandic. I don't think of anything else to show you on this side of the firth, except Laugarness (the bishop's seat), and Videy, that large island there. The mountain over there is Esja, still just the same as when God made it. That is old Bard Snæfellsás² which rears himself there out of the sea; you must not be vexed because he is a little rude in his manners, and turns his back on the governor here. But sit down, comrade, on this bench here! I have something still to tell you which I am sure you do n't know, as you are a stranger here in the south. Sit down!"

"Well, you can tell it me some other time," said Indrid, as, looking out across the dunes, he observed that the young women, whom they had seen before, had turned back and were approaching the cairn. "I think we ought to be going back now to the house, to see whether they have n't something ready for our breakfast."

"That's a good idea, for I'm getting very hungry again, in spite of the salmon which I swallowed yesterday," said Sigurd, rising. "There are your girls returning; I was certain that they would come back this way again, but what kind of a creature is that in company with them? Let me see! why, it looks like Miller, the merchant; yes, it is no other than he."

"So that is Merchant Miller?" exclaimed Indrid,

¹ The ascending vapours from these warm springs gave the name to the settlement Reykjavík, *i.e.* Reek-wick.

² The lofty peak, Snæfellsjökull, whose snow-capped summit is to be seen from Reykjavík at the north-western end of the Faxaflói on which Reykjavík is situated.

somewhat startled, so that Sigurd observed his surprise, and staring at him, said :

"Do you know Merchant Miller?"

"No, but I have heard him spoken of," said Indrid, looking hard at the trio again as they passed the cairn. He saw now plainly that one of the young women was Sigrid.

"Do you know the young woman, comrade?"

"What should make you think that I know her?" said Indrid; "I have no acquaintances here in the south."

"I only asked because I heard you say a few minutes ago that you thought she resembled a girl with whom you were acquainted in the east."

"Yes, but I see now that it is n't as I thought."

"That's about as I supposed, but I see that the merchant knows her. I would to Heaven I were a Dane, as he is! Will you only see how he hops and skips around them, as if he were on a wheel? Those girls there like that immensely!"

"Well, what difference does that make to me?" said Indrid, somewhat petulantly.

"I'm sure I can't say, comrade! But why do you look at him so wrathfully, as if you were fairly aching to kick him?"

"What should put such an idea as that in my mind?" said Indrid; "the fellow has never done me any harm so far as I know."

While they had been talking thus, they had walked down from the cairn, and they now directed their steps toward their lodging. The two girls and Miller walked a short distance in advance of them, but still far enough distant to prevent Indrid and his friend from hearing their conversation. Sigrid had taken

the child in her arms, for it was tired from walking, and the merchant walked close by Sigrid's side as he talked with her. Indrid noticed that Sigrid glanced back over her shoulder once, and he thought that her eyes had fallen upon him for an instant but had been as speedily removed—such a glance, it seemed to him, as we give when we see a person, perchance, whom we think we recognise but are not quite certain.

Indrid and his friend continued their walk to the village in silence, following a short distance behind Sigrid and her companions. Those in advance came presently to a house where Sigrid and the other young woman entered, taking their leave of the merchant at the door, and Indrid observed that Miller took Sigrid's hand at parting. Indrid and Sigurd walked on together to their lodging, the former remaining very gloomy and taciturn throughout the day, for he felt that he had himself been a witness to a partial confirmation of the gossip which he had heard in the morning. He was now more than ever bent upon meeting Sigrid, and as he had thus accidentally learned where she lived, he determined to call upon her the following day. As he revolved the matter in his mind, it occurred to him that he might either fail to find Sigrid at home, or if he should be so fortunate as to see her, he still might not be able to speak with her alone; and it therefore seemed to him advisable to write a letter to her which he could take with him, and leave for her at the house, and thus be prepared for any contingency. When he had finished writing his letter he walked down through the village to Merchant A——'s house.

A short time before Indrid arrived at the house,

Madam A—— had gone out. She had an acquaintance living out upon the Cape, whom she was accustomed to visit occasionally with her children, when the weather was fine, and upon this occasion she had gone thither, taking Sigrid and the children with her. Merchant A—— was at his shop, so that there was no one at home except Gudrun. Indrid knocked and Gudrun came to the door. Indrid was dressed in a suit of blue wadmal, and Gudrun came to the conclusion immediately that he was some yokel who had come down to the village for the fishing-season. She deemed it safest to be on her guard in any event, and therefore only opened the door part-way, and stood on the threshold holding the door knob with one hand, as if to let him know that men of his kind were wont to make known their errands outside, without being invited into the house. Indrid greeted Gudrun courteously, and then said :

“Is there not a young woman living here named Sigrid?”

“Oh yes,” said Gudrun curtly, “a pair of them ; I do n’t know which one of them you mean.”

“She is——” said Indrid, hesitating and at the same time reaching down into his pocket for the letter, as if he had forgotten the name, “she is Biarni’s daughter, I think ; yes, Biarni’s daughter ! Will you please be so good as to tell her for me that a man from the east has called with a letter for her ?”

“She is not at home just now, but I will take the letter.”

“I desired very much to speak with her personally,” said Indrid, blushing. “I have a message to deliver along with the letter.”

“You can call again to-morrow, but it will be best for

her to have the letter as soon as possible; perhaps it may contain something which will require an answer."

"Yes, that may be so," said Indrid. "Please say to her for me that I shall be here in Reykjavík only to-day and to-morrow, so that she may have her answer ready when I come to-morrow morning early."

"I will deliver the message. Is there anything new in the east?"

Indrid was about to make some reply to Gudrun, when a man pushed by him. He greeted Gudrun blithely, but pretended not to notice Indrid. Gudrun returned the new-comer's greeting cordially, and, having invited him in, closed the door behind him and left Indrid to take his departure without further ceremony. It was Merchant Miller who had thus absorbed Gudrun's attention.

"The house is almost deserted, as you see, Mr. Miller," said Gudrun, beginning the conversation; "every one is out."

"Every one!" said the merchant, "when I have the pleasure of finding you at home."

"Yes," said Gudrun, smiling and glancing archly at Miller, "I meant every one whom you hoped to see. They are all gone out on the Cape. One can't always be in luck, Mr. Miller!"

"No, I find it will turn at times; but who was that man with whom you were speaking just now?"

"I did n't learn his name. It was some country bumpkin from the east, who came with a letter for Sigrid, and wanted to speak with her; it is most likely a letter from her mother."

Gudrun threw the letter on a table in the room; as she did so the merchant glanced at it, and seeing that the address was written in a masculine hand he

turned it over, and staring for a moment at the seal, exclaimed :

"From her mother ! This is a woman's name that I have never heard before ; is the lady's name Indrid ?"

"Well, I should think not ; I can't help laughing at you ! What ever put it into your head that her name could be Indrid ? Ha ! ha ! ha ! You have n't entirely completed your Icelandic education yet, Mr. Miller, ha ! ha !"

"Oh well, you should n't make fun of me, Miss ! Why should n't she be called Indrid ? You never can tell anything about women's names in Icelandic from the termination, and that is certainly the name on the seal. You can see for yourself, In—drid !"¹

"Yes, it is as you say, but the letter is either not from her, or she may, perhaps, have sealed it with some other person's seal. Wait a moment, I have an idea ; who can tell whether the letter may not be from some young man or other, Mr. Miller ! She has spoken to me occasionally about some young fellow there in the east, whose name is Indrid. It can't possibly be from him, though," said Gudrun, peering in under the fold of the letter ; "'Reykjavík,"² I can read that much. There is certainly something very mysterious about it ; I am beginning to have my curiosity excited ; oh, if I only had the key to this letter !"

"I have it," said the merchant, pointing his index-finger at it ; "that fellow can get into any letter. Let me see it ; shall I unlock it for you ?"

¹ Cf. note, p. 16. The Icelandic inflected ending has been dropped from many of the proper names in the translation, that they might appear less foreign to the English reader.

² *Lit.* "sojourning in Reykjavík."

"What nonsense!" said Gudrun, slapping Miller's finger. "It is shameful to open letters. Would you like to have any one treat your letters in that way?"

"You mean, of course, that it is shameful, if you don't know how to seal them again so that it cannot be discovered. Let me take the poor little letter a moment!"

"No, you must not tamper with it."

"But I don't mean to—there, the letter came open of itself!"

"Here's a pretty piece of work. See, you have broken it open!" said Gudrun, appearing to be greatly incensed.

"No, I assure you it broke of itself. There is nothing left now, my dear, but to endeavour to seal it again," said the merchant, smiling; "we can take our oaths that we never read it."

"It can't be sealed again so that it will not be discovered."

"I'm not so sure of that, Miss! How do you suppose she could tell with what signet it was sealed there in the east?"

"That is true enough," said Gudrun.

"And who could ever tell from the letter whether it had been read or not? But I don't care anything about the letter; I only want to see from whom it comes."

"I should half like to know that myself, and now that it is opened, we might as well look. Let's see, here it is! 'until death, your loving Indrid Jonsson.' Didn't I make a pretty good guess? I think now we might as well read the rest."

"Yes, but read it slowly, so that I can understand it, and not too loud, lest some one may overhear it."

"It commences," said Gudrun, beginning to read :

"Reykjavik.

"MY DEARLY BELOVED SIGRID—God grant you ever happy hours ! I write you this letter to the end that it may reach you, without attracting attention, if, perchance, I should be so unfortunate as not to find you at home, or if I should not find an opportunity to speak with you privately, of that which I so desire to disclose to you, and which is my sole errand here in the south. The object of this letter is to ask you to meet me if you can to-day or to-morrow. I am stopping for the time being at L——'s, and shall remain there throughout the day, to-day and to-morrow, awaiting your response, for I trust, my dear Sigrid, that you have not so entirely forgotten our former acquaintance that you will deny me the pleasure of seeing you, and I hope then to have an opportunity to say a few words to you. Even if the report be true, which I have heard since I came here, still I beg of you not to let it prevent our meeting, for you know I have no cause to censure you, and you may rest assured, dear Sigrid, that I could never feel less kindly toward you even though I should be so unfortunate as to discover that I have been nourishing a vain hope. It seems to me that it will surely be easier for me to bear the knowledge, that you have forgotten me, if you yourself should tell me that this has come to pass, although you said once when we were younger that it could never be—it cannot be harder to endure than the doubt which has so long tormented me, the uncertainty whether my thoughts about you have ever been other than idle fancies, the creatures of my own imagination.

"May the good God ever bless and protect you !
Do not deny this single request of him who will be,
until death, your loving INDRID JONSSON."

A silence fell upon them both when Gudrun had finished reading, which was broken at last by the merchant :

"The affair has taken a different direction from that I anticipated. Let me take this letter ; it will be best in my custody. You see now the meaning of all this ; there is n't much wanting to make this a letter of proposal. The man puts his case pretty well, and who knows what may come of it if he should succeed in meeting Sigrid, as, according to the letter, he seems so much to desire. I am, however, greatly interested in Sigrid's welfare. I have told you confidentially, already, that I have taken a fancy to her, and she seems to me deserving of a better fate than that of falling into the hands of some boorish countryman."

"She will not be so unfortunate," said Gudrun, looking down at her feet, "if you really have that in mind for her which some people here are conjecturing."

"What is that ?"

"Why, that you intend to marry her."

"I have said nothing of the kind ; but many things come into the mind, and just between ourselves, I have been thinking that Sigrid deserves to be placed in good hands to be cultivated and perfected ; for she is in many respects a very intelligent lass. While I am here during the summer, I am compelled to have a maid to wait upon me and look after my household affairs ; I do not know but that she might be disposed to come to me and take charge of the

housekeeping for one or two summers on trial. With time and change of circumstances, of course, many things may happen. But *you* ought to become the wife of some merchant or factor here in Reykjavík."

"I! a merchant's wife! I do n't know, I'm sure, what should bring that about."

"Many a thing as unlikely as that has happened. Suppose, for instance, that I should tire of remaining in this blessed land, and should give my clerk Christian the management of my establishment, with a salary of seven or eight hundred rix-dollars; then he could set about marrying."

"Yes?" said Gudrun, somewhat shyly, "I do n't see why I should be any nearer becoming a merchant's wife on that account."

"Well, if I am at all good at guessing, you two have no especial objection to each other, besides it would be the easiest matter in the world to give Christian to understand that the condition upon which he would get the charge of the establishment would be that he should marry the young woman who had been selected for him; such things have been accomplished in a similar manner before."

"You are only joking, Mr. Miller!" said Gudrun, laughing, and looking up at the merchant.

"I speak with all seriousness, I assure you," said the merchant, seizing Gudrun's hand,— "with all seriousness and with fixed determination; but it is n't worth while to talk much about it. When I leave here finally, however, I intend that every one shall see who have been my friends, and that I have not forgotten them—but as to this letter, it will have to go the usual way with things of the kind when they stray away from the right path."

"But listen, Mr. Miller! The man has made an appointment to call here early to-morrow morning; what can I say to him then about the letter?"

"Leave that to me. It must be looked to that he shall make no further attempt to see her; and now I must say good-bye! Let this rest between us!" and so saying, the merchant took his leave.

XIII

It remains to be said of Indrid that he was pleased to think that his letter was so well on its way to Sigrid, for he believed that she would arrange a meeting for the morrow, in compliance with the request he had made in the letter. He was, therefore, more than usually light-hearted, and as he pondered the subject, he gradually contrived to convince himself that the report which he had heard concerning Sigrid and Merchant Miller could not be true, for Sigrid was such a careful and discreet girl, that she would not rashly commit herself in so serious a matter as this, especially as she had been in Reykjavík for so short a time ; moreover, it might well be that the merchant had taken a fancy to her, and being anxious to curry favour with her, might by his behaviour have led every one to take for granted as assured, that which was founded upon the merest conjecture.

Thus the day passed. The following morning Indrid arose betimes as was his wont, and was sitting at breakfast with Sigurd and their host, talking of this and that, when, just as they had finished their meal, a boy entered the room, and asked if there was not a stranger there from the east, whose name was Indrid. Indrid having made himself known, the boy

handed him a letter, and thereupon went out. Indrid glanced at the outside of the letter, and seeing that it was addressed in a feminine hand, put it in his pocket, and a few moments later left the room. He did not doubt for a moment that the letter was from Sigrid, and therefore wished to read it in solitude, that no one might see what impression it made upon him, whether it brought him good or evil tidings. He walked out of the town to the eastern bank of the tarn, which he followed for some distance, thinking that as there was no path upon that side there would be very little likelihood of his being disturbed by any passer-by. Seating himself on the grass, behind a hillock, which effectually concealed him from the town, he took the letter from his pocket and read as follows :

“ WORTHY YOUNG MAN—I was not a little surprised to receive a letter from you yesterday, but I was even more surprised to see that it was written here in Reykjavík. While my wisest course would be, perhaps, to make no reply whatever to it, at the same time I feel constrained to send you this communication to the end that all uncertainty may be dispelled. I shall not reproach you for having been so imprudent as to send me such a letter without having first sufficiently acquainted yourself with the present state of my affairs, that you might be warranted in broaching that which you have partially suggested in your letter; you might almost have guessed, however, that many things may occur in a much shorter time than that which has elapsed since last we met. I desire to inform you, therefore, that my surroundings are such that you could derive no possible benefit from an interview with me, if your sole errand to me is that which

I infer from your letter. I trust, moreover, that you will appreciate the futility of writing me any more letters upon this subject, and will understand that such letters might prove of serious annoyance to me if they should come, by any mischance, into the hands of those whom I do not wish to form a worse opinion of me than I deserve. Finally, I wish you all happiness, and be assured I shall be greatly rejoiced to hear before long that you have turned your affections to another who is more worthy of you than

“Yours,

“SIGRID BIARNI’S DAUGHTER.”

Those who have known what it is to follow a dearly beloved friend to the grave, and have seen the precious face and the sweet companionship vanish suddenly for ever in the dark bosom of the earth, can picture to themselves Indrid’s feelings as he read this letter, which consigned to the grave all his hope, the faithful companion of his youth. He sat in silence staring at the letter; he read it again and again from beginning to end, as if he could not be convinced that he had read aright. The blessed sun travelled from east to south, and from south to west; the birds circled in the air about Indrid’s motionless figure; the shadows gradually drew up the slope to his feet, still he heeded them not, and tears, the companions of sorrow and loneliness, shameless when unseen, had so shortened the hours that he had not marked them in their flight. At last he arose, with the intention of directing his steps toward the town; but being dazed, and with his brain in a whirl, he took no heed whither he was going, and wandered on along the eastern shore of the tarn, away from the town. He had walked for some time

utterly oblivious of the course he was taking, when some one tapped him on the shoulder. It was his comrade Sigurd, who had been seeking him for a good part of the day, wherever he had thought there might be any chance of finding him. Now finally, in sheer desperation, he had come hither, prompted by the thought that Indrid might have wandered to this most improbable place of all. Indrid recoiled at the stroke upon his shoulder, while Sigurd, half laughing, peered into his face, and said :

“Whither are you wandering, comrade?”

“I walked out here for amusement,” said Indrid ;
“I was just on my way home again.”

“Oh, indeed ! Well, you have n’t chosen the shortest cut if it is your intention to keep on going east till you get around to the west again—for Reykjavík is back here. But what an expression you have, man ! Why, you look as if you had been sweating blood the live long day ! One could form all manner of surmises from your appearance. I trust the devil has n’t put the same bee in your bonnet¹ with which he bewitched the sainted Jørgensen, inspiring you with a desire to rule the land ? Your whole appearance has so completely changed since we went up to the cairn together yesterday, that I would scarcely know you, and you look as dark under the brow as if there might be a storm brewing there that would shortly leave not a stone in the land unturned.”

“You may rest at ease on that point ; I have no thought of unseating kings or emperors, nor do I take it ill that you should see fit to jest ; but still you

¹ The Icelandic expression is literally, “to swallow the fly” ; it is usually said of a person who has become the tool of another in some wicked design.

should know that there are many things, which may give rise to trouble and sorrow, which one may not care to discuss with every one."

"Well, God be praised, that you were not concocting a revolution in your head, else I should have said that the best thing that you could do would be to come home with me to dinner ; for such folk are apt to become as quiet and docile as lambs the moment they get something with which to appease their appetites, though they may have been before as ravening wolves. However, in any event, let us go home, for our dinner is waiting for us."

Home they went accordingly ; and of Indrid we have, for the present, nothing further to relate than that he remained in Reykjavík for one or two days, having decided not to return to the east again, partly because it was now late in the autumn and there was every prospect of bad weather, and partly because the sorrow with which he had now to battle had so dispirited him, that he did not feel able to undertake the long and arduous journey. He concluded, therefore, to leave his horse in the Moss-fell district, and, when he had done this, he went south with Sigurd to the Gardar settlement, where he supported himself during the fore part of the winter by fishing and carpentry. He called himself Thorleif, and gave himself out as coming from the north, having previously exacted a promise from Sigurd that he would not betray his identity.

From what has been said already, the reader will have come to the conclusion that there was some foundation for the rumour that Merchant Miller was at this time more deeply interested in Sigrid than in any other young woman in Reykjavík ; but while it is true that universal rumour generally has some

foundation in fact, it is equally true that it frequently makes a camel out of a gnat. Such was, indeed, the case with the report which was now being circulated in Reykjavík, that Miller and Sigrid were betrothed, although the betrothal was to be kept secret. Up to this time Miller had never uttered a word to Sigrid of anything approaching love, nor had he, in truth, ever had an opportunity to speak with her alone. Whenever he called at the house he was always cheerful and sprightly in his conversation with the two young women. He soon discovered that Sigrid's disposition was such that badinage was not agreeable to her, and he therefore carefully avoided anything of the kind. He seldom offered to flatter Sigrid in her presence, but when he spoke of her, away from the house, he did not hesitate to speak with favour of her, especially if he had reason to believe that the person to whom he was speaking would be apt to repeat his remarks to her. He never gave her costly presents, by which means many seek to ingratiate themselves with the ladies, but from time to time he would bring her some trifle of no great value, but which always, for some reason, happened to be exactly what Sigrid most desired at the time.

Hence it was that Sigrid was very kindly disposed toward the merchant, which was, indeed, most natural, since when a person is in a strange place where he has neither relatives nor friends, he always becomes attached to those who seem disposed to do him a kindness rather than an injury. Now, although Sigrid cherished a kindly feeling for Miller, for the reasons which we have mentioned, still it is equally certain that she was very far from feeling any deep affection for him, or for any other man in the south. Sigrid

was a woman of great constancy, and like all women of her kind, having once formed a pure and sincere love for a man, she could not bend her heart to a new love even though the former object of her affections had turned his back upon her.

One day, shortly before Christmas, Sigrid's brother Orm came into Reykjavík, as he often did, to visit his sister, and remained until late in the afternoon, and it was noised abroad in the village that the schoolboys had arrived. Orm had decided to return to Bessastad in the evening with the school-boat,¹ and asked his sister to accompany him part of the way to the South over the Skildinganness sands, so that they might have the longer time to talk together. This Sigrid did, and Merchant Miller, having, in some way, received an intimation of the fact that the brother and sister had gone through the town toward the south, promptly took up his hat and gloves, and walked out as if with the intention of following the road which leads out toward the north; but when he reached the little brook, which runs from the tarn through the town, he turned aside across an open place to the shore of the tarn, along which he walked, until he thought that he had gone far enough in this direction to throw any one in the town off the scent, when he crossed over to the Skildinganness sands and looked about him, but could see nothing of the brother and sister. He walked on, therefore, till he came to the hill on the Reykjavík side of the marsh, whence he knew that he could see any one who might

¹ Several miles can be saved in the journey from Reykjavík to Bessastad by crossing the Cape to the bay, south of Reykjavík, and rowing across this bay; the longer land journey is made by the path which winds around the head of the bay.

happen to be walking on the sands. He came to a halt here, and soon caught sight of a woman crossing the stepping-stones in the marsh, and walking in the direction of Reykjavík. Miller at once descended the hill, and directed his steps along the path with the intention of intercepting her. Sigrid saw, and recognised him, but pretending not to have noticed him, she hastened her steps in the hope that she might thus avoid him. Miller, however, increased his strides, and having at length overtaken her, at some little distance from the hill, he greeted her pleasantly, and addressed her in these words :

“Do you know, Miss Sigrid, what I was wishing at the very moment that I overtook you?”

Sigrid was in a merry mood, and answered him blithely :

“How should I know that, pray? But if I had to guess, I should be rather inclined to suppose that you were wishing that your wool and fish would find a good market in Copenhagen this winter; for is n't it said of you merchants, that where your possessions are there will your hearts be also?”

“I do not know that the saying applies any more to us merchants than to other men,” said the merchant, taking the answer more seriously than Sigrid had expected. “I can only say for myself, that I have not so entirely fixed my mind upon my possessions that I do not at times think of other things; but since you did not guess my thoughts aright at once, I am going to tell you what I was wishing.”

“Do; I shall be interested to hear,” said Sigrid, looking at Miller, for she was wondering why he should speak with so much earnestness.

“You must not laugh at my wish, if it should

seem to you odd at first ! I was wishing that the sands were four times as long as they are."

"I'm afraid I can hardly comply with your request that I shall not laugh at your wish ; indeed I believe you intended that I should, for why else should such an absurd wish have occurred to you ? If they were smooth, green meadow-lands, then I could understand why you might wish them to be broader ; but being as they are I, at least, should be quite as well satisfied if they were considerably shorter."

"Indeed it would be quite the same to me whether they were longer or shorter at other times, if they were only four times longer now than they are ; for, look you ! if they were four times as long my pleasure would be increased fourfold."

"It would seem, then, that you are like the children who are fond of wading in puddles. Do you really enjoy marching through mud and sand up to your ankles?" said Sigrid, laughing ; but the merchant replied with the same seriousness as before

"No, that I do not ; but I do feel that I should be glad and well content if I had the whole of my life to wade through fire, and labour through impassable ways, if by so doing I should gain your companionship."

Sigrid glanced for a moment at Miller as if seeking to discover the cause of his choosing so extraordinary a mode of expressing himself. She saw then that it would no longer do to make light of his remarks ; there was not a trace of a smile upon his face, but his head was bowed as if he felt that a deep meaning lay in what he had said.

"I have never heard you speak so strangely as you do now, Mr. Miller !"

"I have, indeed, never before been able to collect myself, nor have I ever had an opportunity to speak to you alone, though I have often longed to do so."

When Sigrid found whither the merchant's remarks were tending, she increased her pace, as if she were loath to have the conversation protracted, and would fain reach her home in the town as soon as possible. The merchant observed this at once, and turning to her with an aggrieved look, said :

"I hoped, my dear Miss, that you would permit me to accompany you the short distance which remains to the village, but you have now so increased your gait that——"

"It is because I began to fear that you had really hit upon your wish-hour,¹ and that the sands were never coming to an end. You know very well that I always enjoy talking with you."

"On the contrary, I fear that my wish about the sands is not to be fulfilled, for we are now but a short distance from the churchyard above the town, and I shall most likely fare no better with another wish which I was about to confide to you, my be——"

It would be difficult to guess the word at which Miller had hinted, and to which he had been on the point of giving utterance, and it is equally uncertain and difficult for us, who are not in the secret of the merchant's thoughts, to determine what it was that prevented his completing the word, whether it was that he happened to look at Sigrid at the same instant and saw that her face was blood-red, or that

¹ It is a popular Icelandic superstition that there is a time as brief as the twinkling of an eye, recurring, some say, every day, others every week or year, at which time if a wish be uttered it will certainly be fulfilled.

at that moment a man from Reykjavík, with whom Miller was acquainted, passed by them. This we do know, however, that he halted at the "be," and remained silent a moment, but not long enough to afford Sigrid an opportunity to reply. After this slight pause, he continued :

"What I was about to say was of no great importance. The request which I intended to make of you was to ask you whether you would be willing to take charge of my housekeeping, the coming spring !"

Sigrid, who had changed colour so suddenly, and had been apparently somewhat discomposed when Miller had started to utter the word which began and ended with a "be," now that she heard this simple conclusion, thought within herself, no doubt, that it was better that a mouse should be born rather than any larger creature. Her cheeks speedily regained their natural colour and she answered him without restraint :

"What could ever have put it into your mind to make such a suggestion? You know that I am engaged with Madam A——, and am as pleasantly situated there as I could hope to be anywhere else here in the south. Have you really decided to keep house yourself?"

"I do not know that I ought to call it house-keeping exactly, but I have decided for the future to engage some one to remain in the house and prepare my meals. I have grown heartily tired of having to seek everything which I need, away from home ; but you need not fear, dear Miss Sigrid, that you would have everything to do ; as a matter of course, I should employ some young woman to assist you, and as to your wages and treatment, you may depend upon it

M

I will see to it that they shall both be better than you could hope to find elsewhere."

"Although the offer is, no doubt, an excellent one, you must know, in the first place, that I am very ignorant of everything appertaining to housekeeping here in the town, having always been accustomed to live in the country; but even if this were not so, there is another insuperable objection—I have engaged my services elsewhere. But why do you not try to find some other housekeeper who would be both better adapted to your requirements and not already engaged?"

"I should not attempt to carry out my idea," said Miller, "without first obtaining the consent of Madam A—— and of any others who may be concerned. I have made this proposition to you, rather than to any one else, for the reason that I prefer you to any other person whom I know here. You surely cannot blame me for choosing some one to help me whom I know is conscientious and faithful, and toward whom I am more kindly disposed than toward any other young woman."

The merchant laid so great a stress upon these last words of his speech, that it was obvious that he desired to impress them indelibly upon Sigrid's memory; however, he could not then discuss the matter at greater length, for they had now entered the town. Here he parted with Sigrid, and turning to the south of the tarn, retraced his steps into the town over the same path by which he had left it.

Sigrid pondered Miller's words, and his proposition seemed to her to have been presented in a very remarkable manner, especially if there was nothing concealed behind it; but she made no mention of

the conversation to any one. It soon became evident that Miller had been thoroughly in earnest, for he laid the matter before Merchant A—— and his wife, and urged them most strenuously to release Sigrid from her engagement, and at the same time he renewed his solicitations to Sigrid to accept the position which he had offered. Sigrid took counsel with Madam Thora. She disapproved of the plan, but said that Miller would certainly conclude that she and her husband were opposed to it and were responsible for her disinclination if Sigrid should refuse to go to him.

The winter passed, and still Sigrid had neither positively rejected nor accepted the offer, saying that she wished to consider the matter carefully, and to discuss it with her brother Orm. Gudrun, however, thought that she could discover that Sigrid was more lively now than formerly when Miller called at the house and greeted her, and she insisted that Sigrid was beginning to betray her feelings.

XIV

ONE evening, not long after mid-winter, Sigrid and Gudrun were sitting alone together in the living-room. The weather was fine, the sun was just setting, and the evening-red fell upon the windows and the floor of the room. Gudrun sat silently sewing in a chair by the window. Whoever could have seen her then and observed the smile which played upon her lips, and the dimples in her cheeks, as they came and vanished, must have thought to himself: Either you are enjoying some very pleasant reverie, my lass, or else some good-looking young fellow is not far away, and is casting eyes at you; you are aware of his presence, but are pretending not to see him, and therefore look down and appear to be deeply engrossed in your sewing; however, seek as you may to conceal your thoughts, they will steal out over your lips.

Sigrid was sitting upon a couch, not far from Gudrun, holding in her arms Madam A——'s infant daughter, Sigrun, a charming child, to whom Sigrid was very warmly attached. Sigrid was singing as she rocked the child to sleep in her arms:

Fair-haired and full-browed,
And fubby and roon,
Light-limbed and lissom
Is little Sigrun.

Wisdom as warder,
Wax strong with thy years !
Worldliness wanton
Ne'er win o'er thy fears !

Sin, with its Siren
Song, soothes us to dream
Spellbound, we sink then
In sorrow's broad stream.

Weak is our will-force,
And children are weak ;
Teach them, All-Father,
Thy guidance to seek !

Sleep thou, my Sigrun !
Sweet bairnie, sleep tight ;
God give thee, girlie,
His blessed good-night !¹

This song Sigrid hummed again and again, varying it occasionally with the familiar lullaby :

Bye, bye ! the wending
Swan, their calls are sending ;
I seem to be asleep,
But I am just pretending.

¹ Alliteration was the distinguishing characteristic of early Icelandic poetry. The end-rhyme was almost never employed in the Old Northern (Icelandic) verse, and was not introduced from abroad until the later development of the literature. Alliteration still continues an important feature in modern Icelandic poetry, and Sigrid's song is so nearly typical of the elder verse form, plus the modern end-rhyme, that an effort has been made to preserve the alliteration of the original in the translation. In the following verse, from the original, the accented words have been marked by capital letters :

Ljóshærð og Litfríð
og Ljett undir brún,
Handsmá og Hýreyg
og Heitir Sigrún.

And when little Sigrun was fast asleep, Sigrid laid her gently on the couch with a small pillow beneath her head, spread her apron over her, and then seating herself a short distance from Gudrun, looked out of the window for a time. All was quiet in the village street: a thin coat of snow lay upon the earth; the weather was clear, the sky bright, and the sun, which had just gone down, cast its blood-red beams over the whole western sea. Snæfell¹ raised its great dome aloft; the fishing-boats were returning, some of these were in the act of landing, while others, which had just passed the islands, were gliding gracefully along in the smooth water. Sigrid gazed silently for a time upon Nature's peacefulness and beauty, and was evidently very much impressed by the scene, for she turned to Gudrun after a while and said:

"God is everywhere good to mankind. How wonderfully beautiful is the weather! How glorious it is to look out now upon this scene! I feel almost as if my beloved eastern fells were before me when I look over at Esja."²

"Yes," said Gudrun, half laughing, "the weather is good, my dear! but so it has been very frequently before this winter. However, perhaps you see some recent changes in the sea or in the mountains?"

"No, but I see the boats come heavy-laden to the shore, and I think I have never seen Snæfell so majestic as it now appears."

"Well, my dear Sigrid, we here in the south do not trouble ourselves much to look at those filthy fishing-boats; I can see little beauty in them, I confess; and as to your mountains, my love, they look to me now about the same as usual."

¹ *Vide* note, p. 140.

² A mountain north-east of Reykjavík.

"Oh, you do not understand me," said Sigrid, with a slight sigh. "I am so fond of the mountains; I was raised among them; it seems to give me new life whenever I look out at them, and they make me long to be back again among my native fells."

"I believe you are always thinking of such things—the sea and the boats, and the grass on the earth," said Gudrun, smiling. "I do not blame you for it, but a person can think of other things than these. Do you know what was running through my thoughts just now?"

"No, but, I'll be bound, it was n't anything about mountains or boats."

"There you have guessed aright, Sigrid! I was thinking how we shall enjoy ourselves, God willing, next Sunday."

"I suppose about the same as we do now, if we live and have our health."

"Well, I would be willing to let old Nick go in my stead to the ball if I did n't think that we could have a better time there than sitting moping here at home. No, my dear, at last we are to have a little festivity here in the village, when we shall have an opportunity to get together and dance away our dumps. Did not you know that we were to have a ball here next Sunday? I have heard such a rumour, and have dreamed besides that we should both be there, though just how it is to be managed is not altogether clear to me yet. The prospect is not very good for me, who know how to dance, but is still worse for you, poor wretch, who know only the little I have taught you."

"You need not waste your sympathy on me, my dear," Sigrid replied; "I cannot say that I care so very much about going, and least of all for the dancing,

as I should probably only succeed in making a laughing-stock of myself. I should certainly only enjoy looking on."

"Yes, you can go, of course, even if you do not dance; Madam A—— goes and she does n't dance either. Sha' n't I drop a hint to Merchant Miller that you would rather enjoy going?"

"No, my dear! I beg of you above all things not to do anything of the kind," said Sigrid, changing colour.

"Perhaps it would be best that I should not do it, for if he thinks as much of you as he says, there will not be any need to remind him of it."

"Do pray cease this everlasting nonsense. Why should he care anything about me? There is not the slightest reason for it."

"I am well aware of that; not a bit more than there usually is when a man becomes attached to a young woman, and makes up his mind to marry her. Are you really so innocent, my love, that you do not see the significance of his asking you to go to keep house for him in the spring? It is for no other reason than that he foresees that which will most probably happen sooner or later—that is, that you two will be drawn together, and so he wishes to give you an opportunity to become better acquainted with him first. It was just so with Madam A—— and her husband; it began between them by her going to live with him."

"If I were to take the position, and that is by no means decided yet, you shall find that I will not remain long with him; for if I should go, it would only be with the understanding that Madam A—— and her husband had given their consent for me to take the position just for the summer."

"And afterwards?"

"I should come back here again, or go somewhere else; I do not now know which."

"No, by that time everything will be settled, and you will have become Madam Miller. Fortune appears to follow some people, and their good luck hunts them down, try as they may to escape it. No one would have supposed when you arrived here, that you had come hither to become a merchant's wife."

"I imagine there is about as much likelihood of this in my case as in yours," said Sigrid. A reply which was evidently not to Gudrun's liking, as it seemed to her to express Sigrid's doubts of her own ability to capture a merchant for a husband, and she therefore answered rather tartly:

"Though some persons may think it unlikely enough now, yet the Lord may provide for me in one way or another; the men are not all gone yet in Reykjavík."

Thus the conversation ended; but Gudrun's prophecy was not destined to remain long unfulfilled, for the next day after this conversation Miller called and informed Sigrid that he had come to invite her to go with him, or, as he expressed it, to ask her to give him the pleasure to permit him to have her as his companion at the ball. Sigrid thanked him politely for the invitation, but excused herself on the ground that she did not know how to dance, and was, moreover, unaccustomed to attend entertainments of this kind. To this Miller replied, that much was forgiven handsome lasses, even though they were not among the most skilful in the dance. Now, although Sigrid was in doubt whether she ought to go with Miller, she did not think it exactly

right to decline so polite an invitation without some cause, and she therefore informed Madam A——, who told her that she and her husband had intended to have her go with them to the ball; but as Miller had invited her, it would be proper for her to accept his invitation, and she might still remain in their company during the evening. Thus it was finally arranged, and so the week passed and still Gudrun had not been invited; this had not, however, prevented her applying herself throughout the week to the preparation and adornment of her costume, and every night she dreamed dreams, all to the same effect, that some handsome and attractive young man would come and invite her to the ball.

Her hopes were realised, at last, on Saturday, when Christian, Merchant Miller's clerk, called. He had not invited her before, for the reason that there had been some dispute among the managers of the ball, as to whether Gudrun's station in life was sufficiently high to warrant her appearance in a company where there would be so many distinguished ladies, as were expected to be present on this occasion.

On Sunday Gudrun went to Sigrid, and said:

"I do not know what you can be thinking of, Sigrid, that you have not yet commenced to do anything toward preparing the gown, which you intend to wear this evening."

"That is the great advantage of my Icelandic dress," said Sigrid, "it does n't need much preparation; you have only to take it out of your chest and put it on."

"Do you mean to wear your Icelandic dress this evening, my dear?"

"In the first place, I have no other dress to wear;

and in the second, I would not wear another if I had it."

"With that white pyramid on your head too, I suppose ; that's your idea, is n't it ?"

"Do you mean my *fald* ? I have, in fact, a brand new one ; I do n't think you have seen it."

"No, and God forbid that I should ever see it on your head."

"Why, pray ? They used to say, there in the east, that it was not so very unbecoming to me."

"In the east ! That I can well believe ; but here, my dear, to appear with such a thing on your head, would only give rise to comment and reproach. Pray do not pain and mortify me by wearing that detestable Icelandic dress this evening. This is a very different matter from stealing into church with it ; there they do n't notice so much how you are dressed ; but at a ball, my dear, you should at least take care that you are not so peculiarly dressed, that the people will laugh at you, and make game of you the moment you turn your back upon them."

"Oh, I am not so sensitive, Gudrun ; but I see, alas, too late, that I ought never to have decided to go, for I somehow feel that it is not the right place for me !"

"Do not say that, my love ! I am certain that you will enjoy yourself very well ; but still I think in a matter of so small importance to yourself as your dress, that you ought to conform to the taste of others, and I do not doubt that Merchant Miller would prefer it if you should go in Danish dress, and would like you all the better for it," said Gudrun, nodding archly at Sigrid. Sigrid remained silent a moment, and then said :

"You know that I am not disposed to put myself

to any extraordinary trouble for the sake of gaining his favour."

"'Summer days come late, but still they come;'" said Gudrun, and the matter became the subject of a prolonged debate between the pair before they parted. Gudrun insisted that the best plan would be to lay the matter before Miller, and hear what he might have to say; but to this Sigrid would not consent. She allowed herself, however, to be over-persuaded by Gudrun, who found a way out of the dilemma by borrowing for her a Danish dress from a young girl in the village, who was ill and could not go to the ball.

In the evening Miller and Christian called for their companions, and they all set out together, from the house, to the Club, where the ball was to be given. We shall not, however, follow Sigrid farther than to the door, taking up the thread of our tale again, when the stars had travelled nearer to midnight than eventide, and when some of the candles in the ballroom chandelier had already burned out, while others were more dead than alive, and when now and again a bluish-gray flame would spurt up out of the candle-sockets, which still occasionally placed their insignia, in molten wax, upon the coats or jackets of the young men as they passed beneath, so that they might have evidence on the following day that they had come to the ballroom, had seen and conquered.

The poor wretches who had been selected to operate upon the instruments which led the dance were taking their departure, with wearied arms and aching hands. When the dancing ceased, the guests began to leave for their homes. Merchant Miller, Merchant A——, and Christian set out together, each with his

lady on his arm. The air was calm and clear, the moon at the full, and the heavens bright with the splendour of the Northern lights; there was some snow upon the ground, but the walking was good and the cold not severe.

When they came out into the street, Merchant A——, turning to Miller and Christian, said :

“I do not know how you feel, but I am disposed to have a breath of fresh air before we go home; the night is so fine that it seems to me that it would be pleasant to take a short turn, around the west side of the tarn, for instance. It will not be a bad idea to follow the students, who have been our guests this evening, and who are now on their way home. Listen! They are beginning to sing, and it is seldom you get to hear a good song well rendered here. Suppose we follow a short distance behind them.”

The merchant's suggestion was favourably received by all, and they accordingly walked along the shore of the tarn, while the students walked out on its frozen surface, taking the shortest way across the ice, and sang together, as they walked, the different songs which they knew, one after the other, among which was the following :

Oh, fair this fatherland of ours
In sunny summer weather,
When pastures green are decked with flow'rs
And flocks sport in the heather ;
When down the mountains' purple crests
The golden lights are drifting,
Till in the dales their glory rests,
Or on the sea is shifting.

And fair this North Sea's island gem,
When each tall peak is wresting,

From streaming skies, a diadem
To deck its icy cresting ;
When o'er the snow-enveloped earth
The star-strewn lights are glancing,
And fells ring with the joyous mirth
Of elves on snow-crust dancing.

Land where our fathers' ashes rest
In tenderest of embraces,
Beside the gravestones on whose breast
New life the old replaces ;
Oh, blessed be thou, cherished fold,
And all thy offspring teeming,
While ever grass grows in the mould,
Or ever star is gleaming !

This song the lads sang two or three times, and it was apparent that they chose it in preference to the other songs, which the students are wont to sing, simply for the reason that it seemed best to suit their mood at the time, and not because it was as well turned as many another which has been sung about our fatherland. While they were singing, Miller and the others walked slowly along the shore, and listened in silence, but the students, as has been said, had crossed the middle of the lake toward the south, and were gradually drawing farther and farther away, until at length only indistinct fragments of their songs could be heard, and even these soon died away entirely, in the distance. They all turned back then, along the path to the village ; Merchant A—— and his wife walking in advance, were followed by Christian and Gudrun, and behind these, at a considerable distance, Miller and Sigrid. While they were following the students, and were listening to the singing, Miller and Sigrid had talked but little together, but now that they had

turned homeward, Miller began to speak with excessive cordiality.

"It has been the source of much pleasure and satisfaction to me, my good Sigrid, that you have seemed to enjoy yourself so well this evening! I could see it in your face, for you were as bright as a rose in springtime."

This was indeed no exaggeration, for Sigrid had enjoyed the evening at the ball far better than she had previously supposed could be possible. She was unaccustomed to such entertainments; and we are apt to derive the greatest pleasure from those diversions and amusements which have the greatest novelty for us. Miller had improved every opportunity to show how anxious he was for her enjoyment, so that Sigrid could find naught but goodwill and friendship in any of his actions. During the evening she had, together with the other ladies, taken a little wine, which always acts as a spur to the feelings. When she came out from the ballroom, the night was so fine, the air so clear and fresh, that any sensitive nature must have been filled with admiration. Hence Sigrid was, for the moment, in an abode of delight, or, if we may so express ourselves, her soul was as if immersed in a fathomless depth of joy and happiness. When Miller addressed her, in the words which we have just quoted, she replied:

"Whom have I to thank except yourself, Mr. Miller, for the pleasure I have had this evening? It seems to me for the moment as if I had forgotten all the sorrow I have ever known."

"You cannot imagine how much I am rejoiced to hear that I have been able, for once, to give you pleasure. Do you mean still to continue to deny

me the single favour which I have been asking of you, or do you fancy that some ill-luck will befall you, if you should come to live with me?"

"Oh no, indeed! I hope that you wish me well, and I feel now as if I could not do otherwise than accede to your desire, if you are really so much in earnest about the matter."

Just as Sigrid spoke, it happened that Christian and Gudrun, who were walking a short distance in advance, turned the corner of a house, so that for a few moments Miller and Sigrid could not see them as they walked by the side of the house. The moon shone bright, and if it could have put its observations into language, it would doubtless have said, as to Christian and Gudrun's behaviour: One, two, three, and the last even longer than the first; I sha' n't call it kissing, children, for I've seen many more given at a time!

When Miller and Sigrid turned the corner, Merchant A—— and his wife had already arrived at their house door, where they paused until the others should come up with them; and here Miller and Christian parted with their lasses. Sigrid was so wearied and drowsy that she fell asleep the moment she touched her bed, and slept soundly and dreamless until broad daylight. When she arose she was sober and distraught, and remained so throughout the day. Gudrun, on the other hand, was merry to excess, and could scarcely utter a word which did not somehow relate to what had happened at the ball, or to how much she had enjoyed herself there, and she could conceive no other cause for Sigrid's depression than that she was perhaps suffering from headache caused by the dancing and loss of sleep. This was, however, by no means the fact, the real reason being that Sigrid now

began to realise that she had been over-rash in giving her promise to Miller, and that she had been, moreover, less reserved in her bearing toward him than she would have been if she had been more on her guard. Sigrid had great faith in dreams, but she had seldom dreamed of anything since she had been in Reykjavík, which had seemed to her worthy of consideration. She was surprised, however, to find that after the ball she began to dream every night, though there were only two of these dreams which seemed to her especially noteworthy. In one of these it seemed to her that her aunt Biörg came to her with sad and downcast countenance, and addressing her rather harshly, said :

“I am going now to the north again, Sigrid ! Give me back the silver belt which I gave you ; you will have no further use for it ; it has no place with the Danish dress.” Although there was no more of this dream, it caused Sigrid so great grief that she could not withhold her tears when she thought how sorrowful her aunt had looked, and she interpreted it to signify, that her aunt, had she been living, would have been displeased that Sigrid should have allowed herself to be persuaded by Gudrun to adopt another dress. In Sigrid’s other dream, she thought that she was again at her home in the east, and found herself in Fairdale, on the same slope where she had been most accustomed to sit when, as a little girl, she had watched the sheep. The weather was fair, and she looked through the valley and recognised every spot, and recalled the name which it had borne in the olden time ; every cleft and grassy bank stood clearly outlined before her in the bright sunshine. Glancing over the slope, she caught sight presently of a little tuft of crane’s-bill, which she

well remembered that she had often enjoyed watching in the morning, when the sun shone brightest, and the flowers sparkled with dew. But all at once she seemed to see a small fleecy cloud drawing over the valley from the north, whence a great storm-gust descended, which whirled over the slope, and she saw the bunch of crane's-bill wither before the blast, and at the same instant she heard a voice, "If I come again, then shall the flowers of this valley indeed perish."

Sigrid could not satisfactorily interpret this dream, but it had so alarmed her in her sleep, that she could not forget it, nor cease to ponder it, and whenever she thought of it, it revived in her memory times long past and the years of her childhood, and she felt that her heart had never before clung so closely to that which had given her the greatest pleasure, and which had been dearest to her when she was younger, and she longed to be back in the east again. At the same time she felt a foreboding that it would not add to the happiness of her life to be brought into closer relationship with Miller. This caused her much uneasiness of mind, and yet, when Miller talked with her, and showed himself to be so kindly disposed toward her, she found herself powerless to give utterance to the feeling of regretfulness, which dwelt in her breast, that she should have given him any encouragement. It happened with her as with so many who stray into the wrong path, that they continue in it, although they long to turn back, and although they realise that each step forward brings them nearer and nearer to disaster. But it behooves us now to leave Sigrid, for a time.

XV

It has already been mentioned, that Indrid, calling himself Thorleif, passed the winter in the south, in the neighbourhood of Gardar (which is hard by the village of Hafna-firth). Merchant L—— had at this time a shop in Hafna-firth. He was a Dane, and greatly esteemed for his uprightness and goodwill toward the country folk, in which respects he far surpassed most of the other foreigners who were in the country at that time. He was a man of mature years, and had a home in Copenhagen, but came hither every summer to look after his affairs. In the autumn, when the ships sailed, he had been ill, and did not feel able to venture upon the return voyage, but had recovered his health not long after the departure of the ships. It so happened upon a certain occasion, early in the winter, that he bent the web of the key to his bedroom, and as there was no good smith in Hafna-firth, some one suggested that there was a man from the north at Gardar who was skilful at such work. The merchant, therefore, sent for Thorleif, who picked the lock and made a new key for it. The merchant examined the key, which seemed to him to display finer workmanship than he had seen produced before by any workman in the country.

This was the beginning of the acquaintance between the merchant and Thorleif, and the merchant soon found that he was not only a skilful workman, but that he was well educated, and gifted in many other ways. He proposed to him, therefore, that he should take up his abode with him, and work for him during the remainder of the winter—an invitation which Thorleif gladly accepted. It was not long before the merchant became warmly attached to Thorleif, giving him a seat at his own table, and taking great pleasure in his conversation. The merchant soon came to the conclusion that Thorleif was brooding over some serious misfortune, which he made vain efforts to conceal, although he was friendly and sociable with those with whom he was brought in contact. A part of the winter Thorleif was engaged in repairing a boat for the merchant. This boat stood in a shed near the house, and it was his custom to begin his work upon it in the morning, before any one else in the village was astir. During the day the merchant often went into the house, where Thorleif was at work, and engaged him in conversation. It was not long before he remarked, and he was much perplexed at his discovery, that, it mattered not how early Thorleif set about his work, his morning's work always seemed scant in comparison with that which he accomplished in an equal length of time later in the day. Desiring to learn the reason for this, he examined the work in the evening and again the first thing in the morning, and found that on several occasions little or nothing had been accomplished, even when Thorleif had gone to the workshop before any one else in the house was afoot. He set himself to discover the cause for this, and rising quietly one morning before Thorleif was up, he went out to the

workshop. This building was divided by a partition across the middle; in one end of this building Thorleif worked upon the boat, while the other end was used as a store-house. This latter room the merchant entered, and took a seat near a crack in the partition. Thorleif soon made his appearance with a light, as was his custom, but instead of beginning work he seated himself upon a stick of timber, and resting his chin upon his hand, sat for some time staring before him at the ground, then taking a letter from his pocket he began to read. When he had finished reading the letter, it seemed to the merchant that he began again at the beginning, and it also seemed to him that, from time to time, he would brush away a tear from his eyes. Thus Thorleif sat for a considerable time, until at length voices were heard out in front of the house, when he sprang up, and began his work. The merchant felt, after this, that he had solved the mystery of Thorleif's demeanour. He went his way, and said nothing about his discovery to any one; but not long after, when he and Thorleif were alone together in the house, he addressed him as follows:

"It is indeed true, as has been said about you Icelanders, that you are a reticent people, and not altogether what you seem; however, I would not have you think that I mean this disparagingly."

"I believe what you say to have been truer of the Icelanders of the olden time than it is of those of the present day," Indrid replied. "Now, I think, most of us carry our hearts upon our sleeves; the ancient Icelanders, however, carefully concealed their feelings within themselves, and to get at the kernel you were compelled to break the nut. At present, however, I think it is quite as well to let the shell go

unbroken. But what leads you to speak thus, my good friend?"

"The thought occurred to me from the fact that I have lately discovered, that some men's opinions of others are far from correct."

"I don't know whether they are so very often mistaken after all," said Thorleif. "They base their judgments for the most part, as I said before, upon the fact that the majority of men display their qualities upon the surface, and that there is nothing concealed within, which is not apparent from without. Is n't it best after all to judge by outward appearances? 'By their fruits ye shall know them.'"

"I am not so learned in the Scriptures that I shall undertake to say whether this passage is usually rightly interpreted. Still, I do know that there is another passage which says, 'God is He which searcheth the reins and the hearts,' and I shall not, therefore, withdraw what I have already said, that men often err in their judgment of their fellows, and it may be that the chief source of their error is that the judgment is founded upon outward appearances. I know a man, for instance, who is apparently happy and free from care, and I believe most persons would say that the burdens of life did not weigh heavily upon him, and yet I am convinced that this same individual has a heartache hidden within his breast, which it is not as easy for him to bear as men might think."

Thorleif was silent for a moment, and then answered cheerfully :

"It may be that he has a kernel within him which you, who see only the exterior, cannot discover."

"That brings us back to what I said before, that all things are not as they seem; but I have now

spoken so plainly to you that you can hardly have failed to suspect to whom I referred. I am aware that you are brooding over some secret sorrow, and if I may count myself among your friends, may I ask you to tell me the cause of your trouble? I feel almost certain that you are either grieving for some good friend, or that love lies at the root of your trouble."

Thorleif remained silent again for a few moments, looking down in the hollow of his hands, and then replied :

" 'All can be said to a friend,' and I feel sure that I am right in thinking that you are my real friend, and no hypocrite, and therefore I am going to tell you what I have hitherto sought to conceal from every one else. First I must tell you that my name is Indrid—I have called myself Thorleif, here in the south, for the sake of concealing my identity—my father's name is John, and he lives at Indridholl in the east country ; all my family also live in the east. Your conjecture is correct, in that the trouble which has taken such firm hold upon my heart springs from love. The lass, for whom I am grieving, was the daughter of my father's neighbour ; she is called Sigrid, and there can be no two opinions as to the fact that she is both more beautiful and more intelligent than most women. Our first acquaintance dates from the time when we both watched the sheep in a secluded valley near our homes, and as the proverb says, 'Man is man's comfort,' so we became very fond of each other ; but we were little children then. Fate separated us for a time, and we did not meet again until we were grown ; then the feeling of affection for Sigrid, which I had cherished in my breast, ripened into love, and I thought that I could discern

the same feeling budding in her heart, if, indeed, women's eyes are to be trusted. When it had gone thus far, my mother, in my behalf, solicited Sigrid's hand, but her mother refused to accept my proposal, although I have always had a lingering doubt whether Sigrid herself was ever consulted. Shortly thereafter, her mother betrothed her to a man in the neighbourhood, but Sigrid broke the engagement before the marriage took place. At that time I was in the north, and Sigrid, soon after, came to live in Reykjavík, and is now reported to be betrothed to some one there. Wherefore I have lost all hope; it was builded at best upon a poor foundation—a woman's constancy; and it is an old saying that we should be wary how we put our trust in that.¹ Indeed I feel that he who rests his faith on it falls as far short of the truth, as one who, having always lived in the mountains, and coming for the first time to the sea-shore in fine weather, when the water lies in a dead calm, should look out over the broad ocean and say to himself: This sea is as smooth and tranquil as a fair meadow-land, surely it could never harm the ships. Now, although all my youthful hopes and anticipations have vanished, still the memory is strong enough within me to keep my grief alive. Love is not like that which is consumed in the fire, which, rising with the

¹ Thus the passage in the *Elder Edda* :

Meyjar orðom skyli manngi trúa,
Né því er kveðr kona;
Þvíat á hverfanda hveli
Váru þeim hjörtu sköpuð,
Brigt í brjósti um lagit.

No one should trust in a maiden's words,
Nor in that which a woman says;
For their hearts were fashioned on a whirling wheel,
And fickleness was planted in their breasts.

smoke, spreads out into the wide air in invisible atoms and disappears for ever with the smoke. Love which burns can never be entirely extinguished, nor does it vanish with the flying hours; the reek lingers behind as a lasting reminder of that which once was."

The merchant had listened attentively to Indrid's narrative, and when he had finished, said:

"It is good of you to tell me the true state of your affairs. In so doing you have given me a token of great friendship, and I thank you for it. Perhaps it will be easier for you to bear your affliction, now that you have confided it to some one, for a hidden sorrow is, I think, always hardest to bear. I do not need to ask what Sigrid this is, of whom you have told me; it can be no other than she who went to live with Merchant A—— last spring; but I am curious to know to whom she is betrothed in Reykjavík."

"His name is Miller," replied Indrid, "and he is a merchant there in Reykjavík."

"Merchant Miller!" said L——, smiling.

"Yes, Miller is unquestionably his name; and the fact that he means to marry her is not mere conjecture on my part, but is a positive certainty."

"There may be more merchants of that name than I know. Can you tell me where he lives?"

"It is the one house in Reykjavík which I know well enough to be able to describe it. There are three houses between it and the house which Merchant B—— occupies, and in the end which looks out toward the brook is the shop, which is entered from the end of the house. There is another door, opening from the street, at the centre of the house, and the window-frames on the side toward the street are green."

"Then we must both have the same man in mind, but I think most likely, good Thorleif—ah, I have become so accustomed to calling you Thorleif! I was going to say, my dear Indrid, that I think there must be some mistake about it. What foundation have you for the assurance which you seem to feel?"

Indrid then repeated the entire story in detail; first as to the conversation he had overheard the night he had lodged at L——'s house in Reykjavík; then how he had seen Miller walking with Sigrid past the School-cairn, and that it had seemed to him, from Miller's behaviour toward her, that they must be on very intimate terms; and at last he took out Sigrid's letter and showed it to the merchant, who, after he had read it, said:

"It does certainly look as if Sigrid was very strongly interested in some man or other there in Reykjavík; but Miller's name is not mentioned, and I can't see from this that the man whom she is going to marry must be Miller, any more than any one else; besides it can't possibly be."

To further support his belief Indrid then explained, that during the winter he had asked an acquaintance of his, named Sigurd, to quietly make inquiry in regard to Sigrid's conduct, and that he had recently received word from him that it had been decided that Sigrid was to go to Miller's in the spring, and that it was the common report that this was but the stepping-stone to their marriage."

"All your arguments in regard to the matter do not persuade me," said the merchant. "I have reason to know that such a thing would be too outrageous to think of. Although there are few here in the country who know it, Miller is a married man, and

his wife was still living, according to the last advices which I had in the summer. She was a widow, and Miller married her for her money, as she was very rich and he penniless. I used to know her first husband better than I know you."

Indrid changed colour at this intelligence. With face suffused with crimson, he sat in silence for a few moments, and then exclaimed :

"Now I see how it all is. Sigrid is simple-minded and innocent, and her heart is so free from guile that she cannot conceive of it in others, so that it is easy to set snares for her ; but I shall not let the shame rest on me of not warning her against this treachery, now that I am acquainted with the true state of the affair." With these words Indrid rose and walked hastily across the room, buttoning his coat, as if he intended to hurry out. Whereupon the merchant arose, and barring his way, said with much composure :

" 'Haste makes waste,' my dear Indrid ! What do you mean to do ? It will never avail you to start out thus blindly. An important undertaking is never well managed without careful deliberation, and I can see nothing so urgent about this that you cannot wait until the morrow. I have to go to Reykjavík then, and I think it will be well for you to go with me and see how matters stand, and whether this is anything more than mere gossip about Sigrid and Miller, and also whether there is really malice in his intentions ; if so it will not be difficult to outflank him."

At this suggestion Indrid recovered his self-possession, and it was decided that on the following morning he should bear the merchant company to Reykjavík, where L—— had been invited to spend the day with a certain Merchant B——, whose birth-

day it was. There is nothing to be said of their journey until they arrived at Reykjavík, toward mid-day. The merchant dismounted from his horse, at one of the small cots east of the town, and having given it in charge there, he directed Indrid to put in an occasional appearance there until he should hear from him. The merchant then betook himself to Merchant B——'s, where he arrived at about the hour of the mid-day meal, and found the many guests, both from Reykjavík and Hafna-firth, already assembled. Merchant Miller was not among the guests; he had sent his excuse to Merchant B——, coupled with a request that he should not attribute his absence to any intentional discourtesy; Merchant A—— and his wife, however, were both present.

The day passed pleasantly, but as the house was rather small, after they had risen from table, B—— invited the gentlemen to adjourn with him to the Club for the evening drinking bout, while the ladies were to remain behind with Madam B——.

XVI

THE evening of the birthday celebration Sigrîd and Gudrun were sitting together at home ; it was growing dark ; beyond this there is nothing to add, save that Gudrun from sheer weariness was yawning famously, when Sigrîd broke the silence :

"If you were at a peasant's house in the country now, Gudrun, they would say that some stranger was coming to see you and was giving you warning."

"I wish to goodness it might be true," Gudrun replied, "and that some one really might be coming to gossip with us and to help us to pass this tedious evening. My relative ought surely to be happy that she has been invited to Merchant B——'s, while we two are left at home here to ruminate. That's the reason why I say that I can't see what better a person could wish than to be a merchant's wife, and get invitations everywhere, be welcomed in every company, live in peace and comfort, and never have to lay a hand to anything except that which is agreeable. How I should look back to my early life if it should ever be my fortune to occupy a higher position than that in which I now am," said Gudrun, straightening herself up in her seat, as if she already felt the blood of a merchant's "madam" coursing through her veins.

"Aye, Gudrun," said Sigrid; "still it is one thing to aspire, another to achieve. But, hush, hush! I think some one is knocking. He who sent you warning did not keep you long waiting."

The visitor was Merchant Miller. He greeted them graciously, and then Gudrun asked:

"How comes it that you have denied yourself a part in this evening's festivities?"

"Oh, I do n't know," said Miller; "I did n't care much about going this evening. I was afraid that I should be bored, and so I remained at home; but now the very thing has happened that I was trying to avoid; I was beginning to grow weary and so I came hither."

"Well, there was some one here who was wishing you would come," said Gudrun, smiling archly at Sigrid, "and now the wish is fulfilled." Sigrid remained silent, blushing at Gudrun's intimation, while the merchant addressing her, said:

"It was with you, my future housekeeper, that I especially wished to talk this evening. I wanted to ask your advice about various small matters before we flit together. For instance, the interior arrangement of the house will have to be changed, as I have at present neither pantry nor kitchen for you. The workmen are coming to-morrow, and I thought, therefore, it would be well to get your ideas as to what might be the best plan to adopt. Will you not do me the favour to come over with me for a few minutes?"

"I have very little knowledge in such matters," said Sigrid, "and it is too late to go this evening."

"It is somewhat late, Miss Sigrid, but you see I should like very much to know what you think about it before they begin to disturb anything, and I rushed into the matter so heedlessly, that I told them to come

the first thing in the morning, so that you see how important it is for you to come this evening—if you have the time and inclination.”

“I daresay you don’t care to have me advise with you, Mr. Miller!” said Gudrun, nodding coquettishly at the merchant.

“Yes, the more the better. I have no doubt that you will be able to give us some very excellent advice. Shall we not be going, or may I not hope that you will gratify me?”

“I’m inclined to think so,” said Gudrun, who then whispered to Sigrid: “What do you mean by this everlasting prudery, always compelling him to urge you so for every little thing?”

In a few words, the upshot of the matter was, that the two friends went out together with Miller.

The house in which Miller made his home was not very large, but very neat, after the Reykjavík fashion. It was divided into two parts, all of one end being occupied by the shop. On the northern side of the house was a door leading into a hall, which extended almost the entire width of the house. On the right hand side of this hall a door opened into the guest-room. This room was half the width of the house, but in length extended the entire depth of the western gable. Another door, on the same side as the door of the guest-room, led from the hall into Miller’s counting-room, and at one side of this counting-room was Miller’s sleeping apartment. From this room there were doors opening into both the counting-room and the guest-room, and the windows from it and from the counting-room looked out upon a small kitchen garden, at the back of the house, which was separated from the street upon the east by a paling fence.

Above this end of the house there was a loft, partitioned off into rooms, which were not used, with the exception of the one in which Christian, Miller's clerk, slept, with a boy whom Miller employed for various small services. These three constituted the entire household, for Miller procured his meals and attendance out of the house.

Miller led the two friends into the room, in which a light stood upon the table.

"Here you behold my home, Miss! I trust that you will be pleased with it. See! this is the guest-room; here, inside, is a room which I have been using as my bedroom, but I have been thinking that I would have a door cut in the side toward the kitchen garden and would have a small frame addition built beyond, and then change the room that I now use as my counting-room into a kitchen. What do you think of this plan?"

"I have had little experience in such matters," said Sigrid. "It is for you to decide, and you can determine better than I, what would be most convenient. However, I cannot see but that this would be a good arrangement."

"It is most important to know how you would prefer to have it, for when you come to take charge here for me, everything is to be under your control and directed according to your wishes, exactly as if you were the lady of the house. It is plain enough here, it is true, but still perhaps it is as comfortable as the living-rooms in the farmhouses in the country. I am thinking of hanging a mirror I have, here on the wall; for you cannot see yourself in the one which hangs over the sofa, when you wake, with the roses, in the morning."

"No, I beg of you, Mr. Miller, do not trouble yourself to increase your supply of mirrors for my sake," said Sigrid, half laughing; "besides, what would you do then with the portraits which now hang there?"

"They can be dispensed with, I think! That is a picture of Napoleon, and I am tired of looking at him, and the other is a portrait of my wife."

When Sigrid heard these words, she felt as if she had been stabbed, and her face became blood-red, but she made no response. It had fared with Miller, at this juncture, as is often the case with men when they utter, thoughtlessly, the very thing above all others which, if they had but taken thought, they would fain have left unsaid; wherefore much thus comes to light that few would have suspected. But as Miller had not taken heed of what he said, he was unconscious that he had made the blunder, or rather that he had said what he had not intended to say; hence he was all at sea when he saw Sigrid's face suddenly suffused with red. Gudrun, however, had observed Miller's mistake, and said:

"I think you did n't notice what you were saying, Mr. Miller."

"What did I say?"

"You said that this was a portrait of your wife. Was n't that a slip of the tongue?"

"No; did I say that? Ha! ha! Well it was n't such a terrible slip after all. You see I amuse myself by calling her my wife,¹ for the reason that it is the only thing in the semblance of a woman that I

¹ Miller's apology is more halt in English than in Icelandic, the old English sense of wife, woman, having been preserved in the Icelandic word *kona*.

have ever had about me here in the house. I bid her 'good-day' every morning and 'good-night' in the evening, but I do n't dare have her in my sleeping-room, for fear that I should become afraid in the dark. It is, as you see, the picture of some ugly and repulsive old carlin, but happily, for this reason, there is the less likelihood that anybody would ever think of believing such a creature to be my wife. But let us dismiss the subject! Shall we not have a glass of wine, and a little chat together, before you go home again? Suppose we sit in the bedroom, for if the light can be seen through the windows from the street, you may be sure they will come trooping in as they come back from the Club, and we shall have no opportunity to talk together and enjoy ourselves in quiet. So we will lock the door and give you the key, Miss Gislasen! You shall decide how long our carousal is to last," and smiling, Miller handed her the key. "I beg you, Miss Sigrid, to regard yourself as already installed as my housekeeper. Pray have a seat here on the sofa, and I shall take the liberty of seeking a place for myself beside you."

Now our story turns back again to B—— and his friends at the Club. They had been drinking freely during the evening, but, as yet, no one had been affected by his potations. In all there had been but three bowls of punch emptied, and the fourth was now under way, while there was probably not a person present who could not look upon the sixth bowl dry-eyed. The room became rather close during the evening, and Merchant L——, feeling somewhat oppressed, went out for a breath of fresh air. As he wandered down through the village, it occurred to him that he had not seen Merchant Miller among the other guests

during the day. He was surprised at this, for Miller was not wont to absent himself from such assemblies, and he decided, thereupon, to ascertain whether he was at home. He walked thither, and knocked at the door, but as no one came he turned back in the same direction he had come. As he was passing the side of the house, however, he happened to glance at the windows, when he observed that the curtains were down, and that a light was moving in the room, and it seemed to him that he could see two or three shadows glide by within, but all at once the light vanished, as if it had been extinguished or had been carried into another room. Merchant L—— was familiar with the house, and knew that Miller's sleeping apartment looked out upon the garden, and that the light could not have been carried into any other room. Curious to know whether the light had been conveyed into the neighbouring room, he turned down the alley which separated Miller's from the adjoining house, and he had no sooner passed the corner than he saw the light in the windows which gave upon the garden, while outside of one of the windows a black object seemed to be moving, as if it might be clothing hung out of the window to dry. The merchant clambered over the pickets and noiselessly approached the window, when he discovered that the dark object, which he had mistaken for drying garments, was a man. This individual, crouching against the window, and supporting himself by grasping the wooden walls of the house, was listening attentively, with his ear against the window-pane, to what was being said within the house. He did not become aware of the merchant's presence until he laid his hand upon him, when he started and looked around,

but motioned the merchant, immediately, not to speak aloud. It was Indrid whom the merchant had discovered, and addressing him in an under-tone, he said :

“How does it happen that you are here, Indrid?”

“Do not speak of it!” said Indrid. “I came down to the village in the twilight, and saw Miller in the distance coming hither with two young women, one of whom was Sigrid. I intended to approach, and speak with them, but before I could overtake them they all entered the house, and fastened the door behind them. After that I came around here, and I have discovered that they are seated in this room enjoying themselves merrily, but I have not been able to catch a word of their conversation, although I have been trying to listen—the first time I ever thought to play eavesdropper.”

“And how long do you mean to remain here?”

“Until Sigrid comes out of the house again, if that be not before the morrow.”

“Aye, aye! Bide a bit! I will see whether I can’t find Miller, now that I know that he is at home. I think he will in all probability admit me.”

When he had thus spoken, the merchant retraced his steps by the same way that he had come. As he passed again in front of the house, he discovered a man standing close to the wall. He was groping for the house with outstretched hands, and did not seem to be in full possession of his faculties. He had no sooner set eyes on the merchant, as he approached him, than he exclaimed :

“Who art thou, old Rags?”

The merchant gave his name, and having recognised the man, said :

"So it is you, John! Whither are you journeying?"

"I shall tell you," said John, with thick utterance, "because you are a gentleman, and a fine man. I shall tell you, I am just a wee bit tipsy, and I am going to tell thee, or, I should say, you, how it was. I got a few nips of that poor devil Gvend, and so I am the least mite happy; but I am not drunk, deuce take me!"

"Yes, just the least bit happy; just comfortably happy," John continued.

"Yes, I see you have had a drop too much; but I asked where you wanted to go."

"Oh, now I understand; well, I will tell thee, my love—you, I meant to say—forgive me, good merchant! I will tell you just how it is: I was going to give that man Miller a dressing down. He is a scoundrel, but you are a gentleman, and I always said so. Just look here, the blackguard has set down four pots of punch-extract in my bill, and you may boil and flay me if I ever had more than three and a quarter. That's the how of it!"

Just as John said this, Miller's door opened and a female form appeared. This was Gudrun, and, when she discovered the men outside, she became alarmed, and, taking to her heels, rushed hastily past them. John caught sight of her, and inasmuch as his vision was dim with brandy and he could see but hazily, he was unable to determine whether it was a man or a woman who had slipped by him. He probably concluded that it was Miller who had attracted his attention, for he flew like lightning out into the darkness after Gudrun, cursing and swearing as he ran. Merchant L——, troubling himself no longer

about John, turned to the house door, which he found ajar, for Gudrun in her agitation had neglected to fasten it behind her.

The merchant, making himself at home, walked in, and passing in to the door of the bedroom, knocked gently, and then opened it, without pausing for a response. He peered into the room and saw glasses standing on the table, while Sigrid, pale as death, was sitting on the sofa, with the merchant a short distance from her, one knee on the floor and his hand on his breast, like to the heathen men of old, when they knelt before their sacrificial altars and invoked their gods.

Miller was startled, as may be imagined, by the merchant's entrance, but Merchant L——, giving no evidence of surprise, saluted Miller, and said in Danish, half laughing as he spoke :

"I do not wonder now that you were not of our party at the Club this evening. You must have a care, though, that I do not tell your wife, when I see her, of your goings on."

Miller recovered himself speedily, and flying into a passion at the merchant's words, cried that it was contrary to all decent usage to steal into a man's house like a thief and fall upon him unawares.

"I hardly supposed you would take my jesting words so to heart," said Merchant L——; "but since you see fit to put this construction on the affair, I would give you to understand that in my opinion it is contrary to all decent usage for you, a married man, to set about the deception of a trusting and innocent lass, who is ignorant of your real position. However, I think it will be best to let the matter drop without further ado. You, Miss Sigrid, would

much better go and talk with your old friend Indrid, who is waiting outside, than tarry here to listen to the declarations of love of a married man."

Sigrid arose silently, and hurried out of the room, while the two merchants remained behind and continued their altercation.

As Sigrid entered the hall, Indrid came hurrying in and ran against her. Both were so amazed, when they first recognised each other, that they could neither of them speak. When Sigrid finally recovered herself, she said :

"How can it be possible that I see you here, Indrid? God be praised that I am permitted to find you now; I verily believe that He has sent you to my assistance. He has always vouchsafed me His protection when I have stood most in need of it. But tell me, where do you come from?"

"I have been here in the south throughout the winter, ever since I received your letter in the autumn."

"What letter? I never sent you any letter. Why should I have presumed to send you a letter? Though I will not gainsay the fact that there was once a time when I longed very much to have you speak with me, but then those who were nearest you, probably, did not encourage you to do so."

"You say that you have never written to me; then tell me, Sigrid, how do you account for this letter?" said Indrid, as he handed it to her.

"Indeed I do not know," replied Sigrid; "but you can believe me, Indrid, I never wrote you a line, and never received a syllable from you."

When Indrid heard this he was perplexed, and for a time made no reply, as if at a loss to understand

the situation ; then seizing both of Sigrid's hands, he exclaimed :

"I am certain, my dear Sigrid, that you would not deceive me, and although I cannot for the moment understand how it is that the Fates have always conspired to separate us from each other, and to drive us farther and farther asunder, still I could not bring myself to believe that you never wished to see me again, as is stated in the letter."

Sigrid silently clasped Indrid's hand and looked intently at him ; he saw the tears well up in her eyes, and her vain effort to speak. No one, indeed, who had seen her at this moment could have failed to interpret her feelings, or to realise what it was she longed to say. Indrid, looking into her eyes, exclaimed :

"My dear Sigrid, I see what you are thinking, and I thank God for my presence here at this hour. I see that you look upon me with the same loving eyes as in the olden time, and though it may be that designing men have set snares in your path, yet am I convinced that God has opened your eyes to see the danger that threatened."

"Of this you may be assured," Sigrid replied, "that the designs of those who wished me ill have this evening indeed been revealed to me, and it was not my foresight, but Him who guides the weak whom I have to thank for my escape. But let us not dwell upon this. The way is short which leads from the allurements and pleasures of this world to temptation and sin. God be praised that the power was given me to see where I stood when I had come thus far. It is best to break away from the noise and rout when our strength is too feeble to stem the current.

I shall leave here, and I hope that you will lend me your protection, and will not part from me before my return to the east."

"No," said Indrid; "grant God that I may never have to part with you again, before death shall separate us!"

"Oh, God grant us this!" said Sigrid, and their words were sealed with a loving embrace.

Sigrid returned to her home, and said nothing of that which had happened; while Indrid went in search of Merchant L——, and during the evening each told the other of all the events that had occurred. The following day Merchant L—— called upon A—— and his wife, and quietly informed them how matters stood, and asked them to permit Sigrid to return with him, to which they readily gave their consent. Miller and Sigrid did not meet again before her departure, and she left Reykjavík with few demonstrations of regret at parting from Gudrun.

XVII

INDRID and Sigrid passed the remainder of the winter at Hafna-firth, and in the spring, when the roads became passable, they prepared for their journey to the east. Indrid and Merchant L—— parted with the greatest friendliness ; and Indrid, Sigrid, and Orm set out together for the east.

Nothing occurred, worthy of record, during the journey up to the time of their arrival, late one evening, at Indridholl, where they were welcomed most joyfully. At Holl, Sigrid and her brother learned that their mother had fallen ill three weeks before, and that her condition was very critical. Orm decided to ride on at once, that same evening, to Sigridtung, but Sigrid was so much fatigued by the journey that she did not think it safe to venture farther that evening, but bade him say that it was her intention to come early on the following morning.

When Orm arrived at Tung he found his mother very feeble, but she was entirely conscious, and was greatly rejoiced to see her son. Orm told his mother what had taken place between Indrid and Sigrid in the winter, and that they had come with him to the east. Ingveld immediately desired to know whether she might not hope to see them, and then learned

that they had planned to come the following day. So the night passed, and early the next morning Indrid and Sigrid were descried approaching on their horses. When Ingveld was informed that they were drawing near, she bade the maid, who was in attendance upon her, place two small chests, which there were in the room, by the side of the bed; after this had been done, with the maid's assistance, she raised herself higher in the bed, and supported by pillows, awaited their coming.

When Indrid and Sigrid arrived, they went up to the bed and greeted Ingveld with kisses. She motioned them to be seated on the small chests, and for a few moments no one was able to speak. So great was the change in her mother, that Sigrid felt that she would hardly have known her; her features were wan and wasted, her eyes glassy, and her hands withered and barred with veins. Sigrid sat for a time intently regarding her mother, and then gently caressing the hand which lay extended upon the coverlet, at the side of the bed, said:

"It is very sad to see how you have changed, my dear mother!"

"Yes, my darling; but it is to be expected after all that I have suffered. God only knows how much longer I have to live, but I thank Him, that I have been permitted to see you once more. Believe me, Sigrid dear, my one wish which remained unfulfilled, was to speak with you again before my death, and to realise that God would amend the wrong which I have done you. We cannot appreciate this while we are in health, but when the time comes that we feel that we are upon the verge of the grave, we can no longer refrain from reviewing our past deeds, and it

is good when God preserves to us our faculties, that we may ponder that which we have done and which we could wish undone, to the end that we may leave this world at peace with all men. God has now fulfilled both my desires, and I am not ashamed to beg your forgiveness, that I have not been as good a mother to you as I should have been."

Sigrid could not speak for her tears, but bowed down in silence over her mother's hand and kissed it tenderly, while Ingveld continued :

"Look under the edge of the pillow and you will find my keys, then unlock my little carved chest ; you will not have forgotten it."

As Sigrid complied with her mother's request, she added :

"There should be a bundle of letters in the drawer bound with a bit of red ribbon ; among them is the letter which you entrusted to Groa. Do not visit upon her your mother's offence."

"If it lay in my power, mother dear, I would rather do her good than ill. God has shaped all for the best for us, and we would best forget the past," and Sigrid kissed her mother again.

"Yes," said Ingveld, "it befalls as He directs ; we poor creatures have but feeble vision, and our designs are of small avail."

From this conversation, which was somewhat longer than we have described, it was easy to discern how great a change had been wrought in Ingveld's state of mind. She was now all impatience for the accomplishment of that which she had formerly used every artifice to prevent ; and she would not be content until she had gained Indrid's and Sigrid's consent that their banns should be read at once, although it

had been their intention to defer the wedding until the autumn. Ingveld, however, was not destined to live to see them united, as she died the day before that which had been appointed for the wedding-feast. The wedding was, in consequence, postponed until after the funeral, and thus became a bridal of mingled sorrow and gladness.

The following winter Indrid and Sigrid dwelt most happily together at Holl, all-prosperous in their mutual love. One day late in the winter Indrid said to his wife :

“I have been thinking that it would be desirable for us to try housekeeping for ourselves ; for while it is true that we have a comfortable home here with my parents, still I believe it to be best for every young man who has the ability, to engage in something which may accrue to his honour and profit, and be of service to his fatherland ; and what better and more agreeable pursuit is there than the management of a farm ?

Good it is to know the farmer's duty,
Well to order the good Lord's gifts.¹

Let us lay this to heart, and we may be sure that the earth will render unto us again the fruits of our labours.”

“I believe you are right, my dear !” said Sigrid, stroking her husband's cheek ; “but where do you think that we should establish ourselves ?”

“Most persons would think that we ought not to be at a loss for a home while we are the owners of four good farms.”

“But they are none of them unoccupied at present,

¹ From Eggert Ólafsson's *Búnaðræðslur*, a poem addressed to the Icelandic farmer-proprietor.

and, if they were, I should not encourage you to take charge of any one of them, for I have long desired to remain in this neighbourhood, and here there are no farms which are unoccupied."

"We will have to go to Fairdell then," said Indrid, smiling.

"Where is that, my dear?" said Sigrid; "I do n't remember that I have ever heard of that farmstead before."

"You shall be permitted to see it some time soon; we will ride thither one of the first spring days."

Indrid could not be prevailed upon to give her any further explanation, upon this occasion; but one day early in the spring, when the snow had disappeared from the mountain sides, and the grass-strips among the rocks were growing green, Indrid directed two horses to be saddled, and bade his wife prepare for a ride: "We will now go for a look at Fairdell," said he. Sigrid decked herself as if she might be going to church, at which her husband smiled, but said nothing further to her as to their destination. They mounted their horses, but when they had ridden out through the home meadow to where the path turned off by the meadow wall, down into the settled country, Indrid guided his horse in the other direction, and led the way along the sheep-path up the valley. Sigrid thought this strange, but concluded that it was a joke of Indrid's to get her out for a pleasure-ride in the fine weather. They rode on up the valley, which was already green, and charming to behold. At last they came to a fair, grass-covered glen, on the farthest boundaries of Indridholl. Sigrid had never been there before, but she soon recalled the spot when she looked across the river. There, directly before her

eyes, were Elfhill and the slope where she had sat, and watched the sheep in the olden days. Indrid dismounted in the centre of the dell and lifted his wife from her saddle. On each side of the little valley were two grassy slopes, which, meeting above, surrounded it on three sides and sheltered it from all winds except that from the south-east. Down in front of the valley was a smooth greensward, sloping gradually to the river, which was rather broad just there and flowed with gentle fall beyond. Two foaming mountain streams dashed down through the clefts in the rock of the mountain-side behind, and plunging into the rich green of the slope, came together near the middle, after having formed a tiny tongue of bright sward. Through the mid-dell a purling brook, which had its source in a mass of rocks above, descended to the river; and along its course, reaching up on either side of the dell, were tiny glens overspread with blaeberrries, juniper, and willow bushes. Between the slopes the surface of the valley was comparatively level, except at the centre, on the farther side of the brook, where there was a little oval grassy bank or knoll. The dell was of sufficient width to contain a home meadow of ample size to afford pasture for ten cows or more, and although the grass was rather short, as is always the case in hard ground, where care and cultivation are wanting, still around the stones, and here and there, where the sheep had been wont to lie, were bright, rank tufts of grass, as green as emerald, which plainly showed what fertility was hidden in the soil.

The weather was mild, and the dell smiled a welcome, and it was not to be wondered at that the blitheness and beauty of Nature should impress any

one to whom God had given an observing eye and sensitive heart, to see and marvel at His handiwork.

Indrid turned then to his wife and said :

“My darling, I see that you are pleased here! God has designed that some one should dwell in this little valley, and make his home meadow on this slope, do you not think so? This is, indeed, that Fairdell of which I have spoken to you, and on this spot, above all others, I would fain make my home. See, here on the knoll, the remains of my house are still to be seen! We will rebuild and enlarge it so that there shall be room for us both, for now the river no longer divides us!”

“No, my love!” said Sigrid, casting herself in her husband’s embrace, and throwing her arms about his neck. “Let us thank God, that He has granted our childhood’s desire its fruition.”

After they had amused themselves for a time inspecting the valley and its surroundings, they rode home again; and Indrid now told his wife in detail of his plans for raising a house in the dell, and that his father had given him all the land up toward the head of the valley, which still left an abundance of land for the farm at Indridholl. The project met with Sigrid’s unqualified approval, and early in the spring Indrid began work upon the house. He had a number of men to help him in his enterprise, but he himself prepared all of the framework of the building.

To bring the meadow under cultivation as rapidly as possible, and prepare it for use the next spring, he obtained his father’s consent to keep the milch-kine at Fairdell during the summer, so that movable sheepfolds were arranged on the meadows, and the cows were allowed to remain there during the night.

When autumn came Indrid had almost entirely finished the building. He and his wife, however, did not move that season, but left their servants at the new farm, in charge of the live stock which belonged to them. The next spring Indrid took his departure from Holl, with his wife and all of his possessions, and by this time all of the work upon the farmstead had been completed and it was ready for their reception.

The first two years that Indrid and Sigrid lived at Fairdell, they could not keep more than two cows, but they had many sheep. Indrid looked after his home meadow assiduously, and little by little it began to reward him for his care; so that they, who have been at Fairdell, say that the sward is of the finest, and that it is plain to be seen, both within and without the farmhouse, at Fairdell that it is the home of a prosperous man and a thrifty farmer. It is to be hoped that many another will follow the example of Indrid and of our forefathers, and cultivate the land and establish farmsteads where Iceland is now unoccupied; for certain it is, that there are still many fair sites neglected which God designed for man's use and blessing. And here ends the story of Indrid and Sigrid.

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